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Sanjana...

SANJANA

Not just a soulful love.. it is love between the souls

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God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; **male and female** he created them (Genesis 1:27)

Chapter 1 - Solitude in the Extensive Spiritual Plane

"The wound is the place where the Light enters you." - Rumi

It was excessively dark in there as though the darkness could swamp and extinguish the light. It was extremely dark as a coal mine that one can touch it and apply it as kohl around one's eyes. There was no glint of light as far as one could see. And there was no ground anywhere to perch the legs. There was a noise coming from somewhere resembling the sound of air which infiltrated into a conch. Her heart was stifling, she was choking.. Her body, floating in the firmament..

She did not know what place it was.. Was it the skies, or the abyss? Or was it the centre of a black hole?

She lifted up her head to look at the sky, but neither did she see a moon, nor the stars..

Where am I now?

Granny…

Niranju.. Where are you?

Mommy..

Daddy…

Where are you all? Is no one around?

It is so dark here.. I am very much scared.. Please somebody come here..

Why is no one coming here? Am I not audible?

Or am I dead?

What am I going to do? How will I escape from this darkness??

She weeped, weeped and kept weeping…

Chapter 2 - Turns in the Unyielding Trails

"Life is a roller coaster, and you never know when it's going to take a turn." - Ty Pennington

October 2023
42 Milton Street, London

“I am so sorry, I kept you waiting for half an hour…”

Ismail Qureshi stormed inside his room stretching his right hand to the one who had been waiting for him..

The man held Qureshi's right hand with both of his hands and uttered, “ not a problem at all, Sir. It's my privilege and fortune to have met you.”

Guffawing, Qureshi let that man sit and settled in his chair opposite to his.

Ismail Qureshi is the Principal of the renowned London Film Institute. He must be in his late fifties, around 58 years. In the 1990s, he had directed many Iranian films that won numerous international awards. He is the ideal hero of fanatics of the World Cinema. It is his dream to create the finest screen personalities. To give life to that dream, he was called from the London Film Institute. He accepted the call and it has been twelve years since he arrived in London. Now he has become a citizen of Great Britain.

“Coming to the point, I am retiring in two years. We are celebrating the Silver Jubilee year of our Institute next year. The founder of this institute wishes to produce a splendid movie on behalf of our Institute. No worries about the budget..

“When I was pondering about the genre, I wanted to make a romantic saga to commemorate my wife, Mehar, who passed away recently. However, it should be unique, in a way that no one ever uttered about such an amorous tale. I was contemplating it deeply.

“Love is common to all the lives in the world. Nonetheless, it varies in its colour and nature according to various places, but its sanctity never changes. People have seen so many movies that display Western culture, like Titanic and La La Land. But I wanted to make a love tale in English with different cultural backgrounds, without changing their heritage and traditions. I was deliberating carefully to choose the cultural background - Arabia, China, Africa, India and numerous other traditions.

“I always respect my gut feeling. Whenever I have to make a huge decision, I leave the responsibility to my inner voice. As usual, as I could not decide anything, I left my gut instinct in charge of deciding.

“At that time, some of my former students came to visit me. They gave me a souvenir. When I unpacked the gift, I saw a beautiful Taj Mahal made of silver.

“I regarded it as the answer of my instinct to my question. I loved to make a world-class movie that conveys a divine love story based in India, also I wanted to do it with a director from Indian culture.

“During that time, I watched your film at the Cannes Film Festival. You have said that you made that film based on a true incident that happened in India. That movie affected me deeply, it did something to my heart. I could not sleep that night. I decided immediately that you are the director of the movie that we are going to produce.”

The man sitting opposite to him was speechless. He was dumbfounded, bewildering if it was true or some dream. After some moments, he talked in a quavering voice.

“I cannot believe my own ears, Sir. I do not know how to thank you.”

“Let it be. Have you released that movie?”

“Not yet, Sir. The producer told us that we would screen the movie in the Berlin Film Festival in February and then release it on the OTT platforms.”

“Good. We have six months to begin our film. Meanwhile, decide who is going to be your director of photography, editor, art director and music director, and tell me.”

“But, on one condition..” said Qureshi in a firm, authoritative voice

“What is your condition, Sir?”

“The ones assisting you and your cinematographer, will be and should be the students from our Institute.”

He looked at Qureshi surprisingly.

Qureshi continued, “However, I will not compel you to enlist ineligible students to assist you. You will have to decide who is going to work with you in this film. We have announced a short film competition for this. You choose the best short film, director and cinematographer and enlist them as your assistants. Similarly, you can use the best actors from those short films in your film if you want. It will be useful for their career, too. What do you say?”

“It is a wonderful thing, Sir. I agree with your condition.”

“Well, an Indian professor works in our Institute. I have told him to come. He will accompany you to sightsee our campus. We shall meet again for lunch.”

Qureshi took his leave.

The ecstasy overflowing in the director's heart, vented out through his eyes as tears of joy. Unbeknownst of the truth that the effort of Ismail Qureshi is going to create magnificent Tsunamis in some people's lives..

Chapter 3 - Aren't you Listening to Me? I am Crying Here…

"Some of the most painful scars we carry are the ones nobody can see." - Unknown

October 23
Marylebone, London

"Manzilein ruswa hain.. Khoya hai rasta.." Shraddha Kapoor was performing for Shreya Ghoshal's voice. Those lines did something to Sanjana who was watching the television, sitting on the couch in her living room. Her memories took her backwards in time, many years ago…

"The destiny is blurred, as the path is lost.."

The sores that were throbbing in her heart for years were again stung by those lines as they passed through her ears… Blood was oozing from her heart and tears streaming from her eyes irresistibly..

She was sitting on the couch dead still.. Her eyelids stopped flapping, her laser shot eyes were piercing the television. The only thing that signified she was alive were the tears that were flooding down from her eyes.. It was not her first time, but it was the first time her daughter Diya saw her in such a fretful state..

She came running to her mother to tell her a good news but she stopped still seeing her mother gripped by concern.

"Mummy, what happened?"

Sanjana, suddenly awakening to reality, replied “nothing dearie” turned off the television, and went to wash her face.

Diya went to her room with bewilderment and concern and kept pondering. She came to the living room again.

“Mummy, shall we go the park now? It has been so long since we both went to a walk.”

“Hmmm,” replied Sanjana.

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Sanjana was sitting on a wooden chair in the Paddington Street Garden, which was located at a few minutes’ walk from her house. The cemented path way of the garden was filled with withered leaves. The lovely evening breeze that blew across, kept playing with those leaves moving them inch by inch..

The dogs that were imprisoned in their flats all day long, happily pulled their pet humans with collar chains and went for a walk. Children were skating adventurously with their skate boards. Sanjana, looked up from the wooden chair and watched the withering trees. They were dancing youthfully in accordance with the breeze, adorning themselves with new leaves.

“Will you not give me the boon of undressing senility and wearing youthfulness again?” She was conversing with the trees despondently from her heart…

“Mommy, your favorite Latte,” Diya stretched the coffee cup in front of Sanjana's face… Waking up to the truth, Sanjana received the coffee cup.. Diya sat next to her.. “Mommy, I came running to you to tell you a good

news, but as soon as I saw you..” Diya swallowed the rest of the sentence without knowing how to complete it..

“Tell me, what is that good news?”

“Next year, my Institute is celebrating Silver Jubilee Year. In order to celebrate it, the management of the Institute has decided to produce a World-class movie, matching the Hollywood films. Some famous Director is going to work on that movie. To select the students who are to work with him in that team, our Institute has announced a Short Film competition. But, only the final year students can participate in it…”

“Hmmm”

“I am the only first year student to participate in that competition..”

“Wow.. Congrats, dearie..” Sanjana embraced Diya happily.

“How is it possible? How did they allow you?”

“It is only because of the Principal of my Institute, Mr. Qureshi. He always believes in my talent. He likes my writing very much. That is why he gave me this special permission. However, my seniors and classmates are so enraged with me..”

“I am sure, others must be resenting.. Well.. Make use of this opportunity wisely..”

“I need your help for that, mommy..”

“My help? What for, dear?”

“We have to come up with a short film that extends for an hour.. The genre is Romantic Drama..”

“So?”

“I am going to make your love story as a short film for the competition. Tell me your story from the very beginning..”

As though dropping the pearls on the marble floor, Sanjana laughed.. “Were you buttering me up for this? Took me to the park and bought me latte.. Think of something else.. I do not feel like telling my story..”

“Mommy.. Why should I think of some other story? Daddy and you loved each other and are married for twenty three years now.. My friends were so surprised to hear that.. And I remember, once you and Dad told me that your marriage happened amid a lot of dire straits. You both have loved each other so much until cloying.. Then why would I think of something else? Your story is the best..”

“Well, ask your dad, then.. You are dad's pet, aren't you? Will you leave me alone now?” said Sanjana, threw the empty coffee cup in the trash can nearby, got up from her chair and continued to walk. Diya trailed behind her mother pleading her to tell the romantic tale..

“Ask daddy? He would not overact as you do.. He will tell as soon as I ask.. But I will ask him to narrate me a story only when I want to sleep. Because, the way he narrates always rocks me to sleep, I will fall asleep within five minutes.. I want to make a film, mommy.. That is why I am asking you.. You are showing me much attitude..”

Sanjana did not give up even after Diya kept pleading her so many times. Diya never ever saw such a stubbornness in her mother. Diya beseeched, contested, and then became quiet. Both of them walked away from the Park

with a burdened heart. Diya did not talk to Sanjana properly after that incident.

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Sanjana..

Aged 47, slender frame, fair skin as that of Caucasians, she had a pixie hair cut and had dyed her hair dark brown. Small eyes with huge eyeballs swimming in that white ocean, intense gaze, sharp nose as though it was sculpted with a perfect measurement, naturally rosy lips without a tint of lipstick on them, beautiful teeth alignment as though pearls were arranged in order, whenever people see her smile, they will feel like a lamp lit in them, a tiny mole near left ear above the jaw.. Though she was in her middle age, she resembled as beautiful as a Chinese doll, and breathtaking as a Kashmir apple..

Diya..

Aged 19, ever-smiling face, she looks like a photocopy of her mother, but she has quite big eyes, energetic gaze, she tucked her long black tresses into a ponytail. She is always as active as a bee, she is a cute little wingless cherub..

Sanjana was working from her home in London, as a team leader of a well known software company located at Glasgow.

It was a Thursday..

Sanjana took part in the Zoom online meeting from her home, she was wearing her headphones. A client from Kiev was talking on the other side in English with Ukrainian slang. Sanjana turned off the video camera of the Zoom meet, and took in the words without much interest, she was pondering something.

Diya entered the house then, she stormed into her room without wanting to acknowledge her mother. Sanjana noticed that Diya was worried about something, her face was sombre. She said some reason and left the meeting, went into the kitchen and prepared chocolate coffee for Diya, went inside her room and gave her the coffee cup.

Diya intentionally avoided looking at her mother and was drowned in work, staring at her laptop screen. Sanjana placed the coffee cup in the nearby table, hugged Diya with her right hand from behind and buried her face in the crown of her head. Diya, who did not expect such a reflex from her mother, continued to do her work..

The tears streaming from Sanjana's eyes flowed over Diya's crown, tracing a path through her dense hair, and finally descended onto her scalp, leaving it warm. Diya was appalled. Her fury exhausted at once, she got up from her seat and embraced her mother.

“I have never seen you like this, mommy… I can understand that there must be some reason which keeps you from sharing your story.. I was not aware of it.. I am sorry, mommy, for being angry on you.. I have hurt you, mommy, I am really sorry..”

Sanjana consoled Diya, “not a problem, dearie.. You do not cry.. What is wrong with you? You look so dull today.. How is your short film project going?”

“You refused to tell your story. So I wrote a story by myself and showed it to Mr. Qureshi. He rejected it. After that, I wrote two other stories and showed them to him. They were not upto his expectations. He told me to withdraw my name from the competition if I do not bring him a story that meets his anticipation.

“I tried, mommy. But I could not come up with a nice story. I did not want to disturb you as well. So I decided to quit. I am typing a letter to withdraw my name from the competition…”

Sanjana looked at Diya's laptop. Diya had typed two paragraphs, regarding retracting from the competition. It was still incomplete. Sanjana read the letter and looked at Diya's face..

“How can you miss such a wonderful opportunity? You told me that your seniors and classmates were mad at you. If you quit, will it not be shameful?” Diya was silent, she did not reply to her mother's question.

As Sanjana closed that window and deleted that file from the document folder, Diya's face lit up with faith.. She glanced at her mother with curiosity and joy..

Chapter 4 - The First Meeting in the Vast Spiritual Plane

"Two souls are sometimes created together and in love before they're born." — F. Scott Fitzgerald

Is this Stygian darkness? Or Cimmerian Ocean?

What is this plain, where nothing or nobody exists?

No, one thing exists here certainly.. 'Darkness' … Hmmm.. And another element dwells here.. Plentifully… 'Fear..'

How much ever I holler, how much ever I cry out, nobody is going to come here to help me.. There is no other way to escape from this abyss, I am going to die here bellowing with all my vigor..

She kept sobbing and weeping.. She had no faith..

Suddenly..

A hand grasped her right hand tightly.. It tried to pull her out with all its strength.. Her pulse had become weak and thready in fear..

She came out from there.. That hand had not loosen its grip yet..

Who brought me out from this chasm? She looked up with bewilderment.. He was looking at her intensely, still holding her hand.. His face emoted ecstasy.. He was smiling joyously.. He smiled charmfully.. He did not talk anything.. He kept chuckling, looking at her face, as though he found something priceless and irreplaceable..

She could not believe herself. He resembled her so closely that it seemed as if he was moulded from her frame, but in a male image, he also seemed to be in her age..

The moment she saw his face, the fear, fret, anxiety, sorrow, even the tear drops that rolled down from her eyes vanished. She has seen him somewhere beforehand. His face seemed so familiar to her, in a way that she had been acquainted with him for epochs. She began to laugh happily at him just like he did.

She noticed the place then. The Sun was rising from the horizon spreading orange hues. It was a flourishing farmland. Corncobs were mature and ready for harvest. Along with the humid breeze, the fragrance of corn filled the place, pleasing her nostrils.

The terrain was filled with trees, birds hid inside the leaves of those trees, chirping beautifully. Colourful flowers blossomed here and there, spreading their scents everywhere, butterflies perched on those flowers, collecting nectar. A crystal clear stream reflected the beautiful horizon, opposite to the ridge in which they were standing. A fluffy white rabbit ran in between their legs, clutching a bunch of hay, and hid amid the corncobs.

What place is this? What is this emotion? I have never been this much happier.. Are the hellish chasm in which I was struggling some moments ago, and the splendid fruitful grassland in which I stand now, exist in proximity? How did I come out from that abyss as soon as he pulled my hand?

Well.. Who is he?

As she glanced at him pondering about the events, he who was playing in the stream, paddling in the water, called her gesturing his hand. Without defying, she ran towards him. He scooped the lucid water with both of his hands from

the stream and splashed it on her. She thrilled as the icy cold water splashed over her. He laughed loudly.

She chased him, he ran swiftly without getting caught. They both became exhausted after a while and sat near the bank of the stream. He talked to her about various things. She understood what he spoke. They both communicated as though they were acquainted for ages. They laughed euphorically. They built sand castles and played gleefully.

A little far from there, situated an orchard with delectable fruits. Clusters of orange and red coloured fruits hanging in those trees drew their attention. He showed her the orchard and called her to go with him, she refused and told him that her knees hurt. He hoisted her onto his shoulder and walked towards the orchard.

She reclined on his shoulder, holding his neck tight, closed her eyes, she felt safe and secure. He carried her and walked towards the fruit farm...

“Maheshwari..”

Called Father Lawrence aloud..

“Coming, bhaiya..”

Sanjana's mother Maheshwari came out from her house.

“Little girl slept in the church itself..” said Father Lawrence, Maheshwari shifted the sleeping Sanjana from Father Lawrence's shoulder to hers.

“Come inside, bhaiya.. Have some ginger tea..”

“No, sister.. Some guest has come to visit you, it seems.. Take care of them. I have got some work at the church.. I shall come later..”

“We called an astrologer, bhaiya.. He had come now..”

Maheshwari's husband Jayaram Tagore called her from the living room, “Maheshwari, can you bring Sanjana's natal chart?”

“Fine.. You attend to them. I shall come later.. Convey my regards to Jayaram..”
Father Lawrence took his leave.

Maheshwari laid Sanjana on the bed and went into the religious chamber, took out her birth chart, went to the living room and gave it to her husband. Jayaram presented it before the astrologer humbly.

The astrologer lethargically turned the pages of the birth chart, chanting some prayers, without knowing that he is going to witness a unique, distinct natal chart that he had never ever seen before..

Chapter 5 - Divine Child

"Smooth seas do not make skillful sailors." - African Proverb

The lips of the astrologer that were chanting prayers continuously, suddenly stopped. His face became sombre, his eyebrows shrunk rigidly.. He took out his notebook and drew a chart, doodled something, calculated with his fingers, he took out some of the old books he had brought, turned out some pages and read them.

Usually, within five minutes of reading a natal chart, he would tell the astrological benefits and drawbacks of a person as continuous as the flow of a river. His student who came along with him looked at him surprisingly as his master had not spoken a word about the natal chart even after half an hour of studying it.

“Please say something Swamiji.. Why are you not telling anything? It is worrying us..” said Sanjana's maternal grandmother anxiously. He gestured her to wait for a while and continued to study the birth chart.

After twenty more minutes of studying, he cleared his throat in order to annul his silence.

“Hmmm.. She is a Cancerian…Born in Aashlesha Nakshatra..

The south node of the Moon (Ketu) is situated in Pisces.. The Saturn-Moon conjunction is present in one degree in Cancer.. Vish yog appears to be vigorous.. Kaal Sarp dosh is present too.. Escalating the situation, Shani sade sati is also going on now..” He looked at Maheshwari and inquired, “Is your daughter experiencing paranoia often?” As soon as he asked, Maheshwari closed her mouth with the hem of her saree and began weeping. Jayaram

Tagore consoled his wife, patting her shoulder and replied to the astrologer, “Yes, Swamiji.. We called you here to know about it..”

The astrologer remained quiet for a while..

“There is an issue in her birth chart, however, you do not have to be distressed about it. Otherwise, it is an excellent birth chart. She has a blessed future, she will live a happy, prosperous life abroad, she will be blessed with children.. But, she will face a lot of hardships.. She will stumble in making decisions. Her mind will always be in a confused state, fretting about something. She will be very stressed. Only after 36 years of age, it will reduce gradually..

“I have been predicting horoscopes for forty years now. I have never seen such a spiritual chart in all my experience. But, upto 50 years of age, she will deal with numerous challenges. Regardless of being endowed with prosperity, expat life, job and kids, she will feel like she is bereft of everything. She will often feel inclined to become an ascetic. After experiencing everything, dispirited and dejected, she will choose the metaphysical lifestyle, post 50 years of age. The turning point of her life lies after that. Take note of the information that I am saying now, before she demises from this earth, she would have lived as an exemplary, a guide and a spiritual leader of millions of people. This world will not forget her existence for thousands of years. There is nothing more to convey!!” The astrologer closed the birth chart and gave it to Jayaram Tagore saying, “It is my privilege to have studied this natal chart,” he touched Sanjana's birth chart with reverence, took his bag and got up to leave.

Sanjana's parents were thrilled to hear that, they looked at each other astonishedly. Grandmother inquired, “But, Swamiji, you said that there is some dosh!!”

The astrologer replied, “Of course, there is a malefic dosh.. Nonetheless, God has given her that dosh in order to transform her into a noble soul.. According to me, it is not a malefic effect, but an auspicious fortune! Even Swami Vivekanand and Rishi Aurabindo have had vish yog in their natal charts.. Therefore, do not worry about it! Nothing will happen to her! I will tell you some remedies. Practice it everyday, it will reduce the vigorousness of the dosh..”

After listening to the remedies carefully, Jayaram Tagore offered a bundle of cash to the astrologer in order to compensate for his services, but he refused to get it, greeted him and took his leave.

Grandmother went into the chamber in which Sanjana was sleeping tranquilly. She held Sanjana's tender feet and hoisted it onto her forehead with reverence and love and kissed her sole ardently. Maheshwari was looking at the scene with tears flooding in her eyes. Sanjana was sleeping sound and still.

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1983, Darjeeling, West Bengal…

Jayaram Tagore printed and supplied text books for Engineering students across West Bengal. His wife Maheshwari Tagore has completed Post graduation in English. But she did not go to work.

Their elder daughter, Niranjana Tagore resided at her aunt's house in Kolkata and was studying eighth grade in a famous convent school. She was a very studious girl. Her ambition was to become a doctor. The age difference between Niranjana and Sanjana was six years.

Sanjana's grandmother, in other words, Maheshwari's mother was in her late sixties, around 67 years of age. After the demise of her husband, she

continued to reside with her daughter. Her Son-in-law looked after her as though he were her own son. Sanjana loved her grandmother a lot more than her mother. She would come back home from school, yelling, “granyyy” while entering her home. She loved the fairy tales that her grandmother tells! She would fall asleep every night after chatting with her grandmother and listening to her stories while having her supper.

Sanjana was six years old then, she was struggling with an excruciating mental sickness for the past two years. She would be thinking of something very seriously. Her mind would be a chaotic mess during those times. Her mind would become like a sea agitated by a fierceful tornado. The tender immature infant did not even know what was happening inside her little brain. She was not sentinent enough to tell her parents how she felt to seek their assistance. Most of the times, fear and confusion would vanish within two hours. However, sometimes, it would aggravate very much and she would become unconscious during the peak of that chaotic state. The dream of darkness appeared to her in that unconscious state. The nightmares were worse than the distress that she faced while she was awake.

Within these two years, she might have had those nightmares atleast 15 times. Whenever she felt disturbed by such disarray, she would go a little chapel nearby. Except Sundays, on the rest of the days only Father Lawrence would be there in that chapel. Some people would visit the chapel at times, lit candles and offer their prayers. There was a plenty of space before the chapel. Therefore, it was a refuge for all the kids in that area. Occasionally, Father Lawrence would call those children, offer them snacks and would tell them Biblical stories. He would become a kid himself, he would sing and dance along with them.

Sanjana liked the statue of Crucified Jesus Christ that was hung in the altar of the chapel, the peace that gleamed from His face and she also loved the luminescence spread by candles that were lit under his legs. As it tranquillised her, she would run to the chapel whenever she felt confused.

Oftentimes she would lie on the bench of the chapel and doze off. Father Lawrence would carry her to her home without wanting to disturb her slumber.

Father Lawrence Hajong, who was 48 years old was from Meghalaya. He was a close friend of Jayaram Tagore. Maheshwari considered him as her own brother. Not only the Tagore family, all the people in that area considered him not as a religious leader, but as their own family member. He always behaved in a way deserving their honour.

Sanjana's parents took her to a Psychiatrist, without knowing about her issue. The Psychiatrist diagnosed her and prescribed some medicines, after taking those pills, Sanjana kept sleeping more than usual. Even though it appeared to be a temporary solution, Sanjana's parents were worried about it. They then decided to stop those medications and seek a remedy from an astrologer. On the other hand, Father Lawrence kept praying for Sanjana faithfully and compassionately.

On such a circumstance, when astrologer visited their home, Sanjana who was sleeping in that chapel had that dreadful dream followed by that miraculous, wonderful experience.

Chapter 6 - A three and a half foot remedy bottle

"Destiny grants us our wishes, but in its own way, in order to give us something beyond our wishes." — Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

As the astrologer left, Jayaram Tagore also left the house along with him. Grandmother and Maheshwari were in the kitchen, cooking together. A screeching sound of the swing in the living room, fetched the attention of Maheshwari. She ran into the living room to see what was happening.

Sanjana, who awoke from her sleep was playing enthusiastically. Most often, she would be lying curled up on the swing or she would be sitting still, pondering about something ruefully. She would not play on the swing unless someone pushes it.

However, Sanjana was playing on the swing, very fast in an excited manner that day which surprised her mother. She halted the swing and hoisted Sanjana onto her waist and went into the kitchen talking to her.

“My sweetie Sanju looks so delighted today? What happened?”

“Do you know, mommy?” began Sanjana and unfolded the events that she perceived in her dream in her childish tone. Grandmother and mother apprehended that she must have had a lovely dream. They looked at each other and smiled. Sanjana was not patient enough to talk, she ran out to play.

The effect of the dream, remained in her for the next two days. She was calm and felt contented, she ate well, played blissfully, studied enthusiastically and slept soundly. Her parents and grandmother noticed the change in her. Niranjana, who telephoned her mother, also came to know about the change in her sister and felt delighted for her.

The same old condition relapsed again on the third day. As she was encapsulated once more by fatigue, bewilderment and fear, her family members who felt relieved, seeing the change in her during the past two days were swamped by sorrow once again.

As per the advice of the astrologer, Hanuman Chalisa and Mrityunjaya Mantra were played on the tape recorder everyday. Sanjana was taken to a Shiva temple everyday around 7 O'clock in the morning, which was located three kilometres away from her home, Sanjana's name was consecrated everyday and they also offered to bathe the Shivling with milk each day as a part of their prayer. In the chilling mornings of Darjeeling, her father Jayaram Tagore, took Maheshwari and Sanjana in his Rajdoot bike. Whenever he was out of town, Father Lawrence would take them both to the temple in his green Lambretta scooter and would drop them at home.

It was difficult for Sanjana in the beginning, nonetheless, she began liking it later. Reason being the Nepali Sel Roti which Sanjana's father bought her everyday from a famous savoury shop, while returning from the temple. It was so appetising and delicious. Sanjana passed on this habit to Father Lawrence also. As days passed, he also became addicted to the deliciousness of Nepali Sel Roti. Most often, it was his favourite breakfast.

In a fortnight, Sanjana had that nightmare once again and he also arrived, as her knight in shining armor. This time, their meeting was on a hill station. Sky-high mountains, whose peaks were overshadowed by a duvet of clouds. The colossal mountains were painted green by the tea plants and apple trees. The abode looked manifold times exquisite than Darjeeling. Sanjana treasured those few minutes that she spent with him in her dreams. They both conversed and laughed gladly. When she woke up from her sleep, she could only feel the bliss that rimmed over her heart as the effect of the dream. She never remembered what she spoke to him in her dreams.

Once again, she felt composed and tranquil for the next two days and the same old condition relapsed again. This cycle continued. Nonetheless, she fainted twice or thrice a month due to her mental struggles and met him in her dreams each time. This had become regular. As Sanjana illustrated everything that she saw in her dreams to her grandmother, her parents, they realised that something was not right. They took her again to the same Psychiatrist. “Who told you to stop the medicines?” the Psychiatrist rebuked them.

The Psychiatrist explained that the reason behind Sanjana's dreams was ‘Hallucination.’ “This is the attempt of her own brain in order to ease her from the extremity of mental struggles. This might appear to be something good in the beginning, but if she did not take right medicines, hallucinations will worsen her mental condition. So, give her the medicines properly which I am prescribing now,” advised he.

Sanjana's grandmother had already told her, “The boy who comes in your dreams is a Prince sent by God to rescue you.” As she had told her a lot of fairy tales, in which the boy in her dreams and Sanjana were the protagonists, Sanjana was drowned in a fantasy world thinking of him. Maheshwari told her mother, “Do not tell her fairy tales about him, it will worsen her hallucinations..” Grandmother refuted, “No, see how happy she becomes as soon as I talk about him. She feels relieved from all her fret at the thought of him. He is her elixir!” They both began disputing.

Honestly, he has become Sanjana's world. She has doodled his face in all her notebooks. She felt worried when her family members told her that he is just her imagination and not real. She went crying to her grandmother most often saying that she wanted to see him in person. This distressed her grandmother, too. Nowadays, her only prayer in temple and in chapel was to see him in person, at least once. Just once.

Two years rolled as such…

1985, December..

Sanjana was eight years old now. Her sister Niranjana had come home as it was her Half-yearly holiday. She had saved money, penny by penny, given by her parents and relatives for a year and while returning home, she visited Modern Toys Shop, a famous toy shop in Kolkata and bought her dear sister a Teddy-bear doll. Sanjana liked that Teddy-bear so much. She had it with her 24/7. Even while sleeping, she embraced it tight with her tiny, slender fingers.

The only assignment that Maheshwari had given to Niranjana was ‘erasing the boy from Sanjana's mind.’ “Sanju dearie.. The guy whom you see in your dreams.. He is not real, my dear.. It is God who took the form of a boy to heal you…” As Niranjana uttered those words, Sanjana became furious and threw the Teddy-bear doll on her face. She sat on the swing, sullen and silent.

Chapter 7 - Unforeseen Arrival of the Hero

"Some people come into our lives and quickly go. Some stay for a while, leave footprints on our hearts, and we are never, ever the same." - Flavia Weedn

1986, February..

"Auntie…"

"Sanjana…"

Sanjana ran out to see who was calling her…

He stood near the front gate of their house. He must be around 10 years old. He had a very fair skin, his eyes were blue and he had quite long hair which dangled over his forehead, reaching his blue eyes. He resembled a wax statue. He was wearing a purple checked shirt, paired with blue jean and immaculate white shoes.

Sanjana saw him and stormed inside her house and called her mother, "Mommy.. Some foreigner is standing in front of our house.. He is calling me by my name.. How does he know me, mommy?"

Maheshwari came outside to see who it was. Her eyes shot wide open with amazement. She inquired, "What do you want, little boy?"

He did not utter a word. Instead he pointed his index finger towards the street. Maheshwari stepped down to see where he directed his finger. Five houses away from their's, Jayaram Tagore was standing. Near him, was a truck that carried furniture and possessions. Some men, unloaded the things into that house.

Jayaram Tagore said, “Maheshwari, I need a hammer and some nails. Can you give them to the boy?”

Maheshwari apprehended… “A family is moving into their street..” It is Jayaram Tagore's nature, offering to help people voluntarily, even strangers. Because of this reason, he had numerous friends. Even if he were to run for a Presidential post in that ward, he would win undoubtedly.

She showed the hammer and nails to her husband who stood a little far away and gave it to that wax statue. Jayaram Tagore called out from there,

“Maheshwari, bring some tea in a flask..”
She nodded yes with a smile in her heart..

Maheshwari took Sanjana along with her, and went there with a flask full of masala tea… Wax statue was playing with an aeroplane toy in the porch.

The Patriarch of the family and Jayaram Tagore were engrossed in arranging things. The Matriarch of the family came to the porch to receive Maheshwari, stretching her hand in order to welcome her in..

“Please come inside, I'm Celine Rao..”

Maheshwari comprehended why the little boy looks like a stunning wax statue.. She replied with a smile, “Maheshwari Tagore..”

As Sanjana touched Celine's feet as a gesture of greeting her, Celine was moved. “Wow, you have raised your child exceptionally!!” She kissed Sanjana's crown.

“Please come in, sister..” Celine's husband Hari Govind Rao welcomed Maheshwari.

Sanjana touched his feet, too, like a wind-up toy and greeted him. He blessed Sanjana with a gentle pat on her head and said, “You are rendering us this much help without even knowing us before..” “So what if we are not acquainted before.. You are going to reside in our street.. You, too, are our family now..” replied Jayaram Tagore, coming from the nearby chamber, wiping off the sweat on his forehead with his hand-kerchief.

Sanjana was prodding her mother to tell her something important, Maheshwari bent down to know what she wanted to convey. She said, “Mommy.. Look, auntie also has blue eyes like him..” Celine listened to it and replied with a chuckle, “no,no, sweetie, he has gotten those blue eyes from me..” She turned to Maheshwari and said, “My native is Athens, Greece. His native is Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh. We studied in the same college in Mumbai.. Ours is a Love Marriage..”

It was quite a big house in that whole street. As the owner of the house had gone abroad, it was unoccupied for the past two years. However, renovation work was going on for the past two months. But no one knew who was moving into that residence. Hari Govind Rao bought that house and has moved in with his family. Hari Govind Rao’s father, Amarnath Rao is a business magnate in Visakhapatnam. He excels in tea business. He has put his younger son, Hari Govind Rao in charge of maintaining the tea farm that he owns in Darjeeling. So Hari Govind has come here along with his family. His father had told him to create a new brand of tea, market it and to succeed in business. That is the target his father had set for him.

The blue-eyed Wax statue, born of parents Hari Govind Rao and Celine Rao is called Kailash Rao. They were searching for a good school in Darjeeling to enroll their child in grade five. He stood shyly behind his mother, but his blue eyes were silently searching for Sanjana. He went to Maheshwari and inquired,

“Auntie, which school is Sanjana studying at?”

****

A good friendship has blossomed between Sanjana and Kailash within a few days. Sanjana was in grade five now, and Kailash in grade six. Though she had many friends, her foremost best friend was only Kailash. She liked travelling in the school bus along with Kailash.

As Sanjana's mother was a post graduate in English, Niranjana and Sanjana were fluent in speaking English. Sanjana's grandmother was well-versed in English as well. Therefore, they often speak in English at home. As Kailash did not know Bengali, he had no companion other than Sanjana to converse and play.

When Sanjana strived with mental struggles, Kailash would give some of his toys so as to console her. Kailash had become grandma's pet. He would sit along with Sanjana and listen to grandmother's stories. Whenever grandmother narrated the Sanjana-Prince fairytale, he would imagine himself as the Prince.

Sanjana had those dreams still. But it was not like before, Sanjana used to weep and he would come to rescue her, pulling her from the darkness. Now, he came directly, trouble-free.

Once, they met in a farmland, then in a seashore, another time, in a meadow, snow-capped mountains, fruit orchard.. The places they met kept changing.. Sanjana was totally captivated by the thoughts of him. Even if she spoke a lot with him in her dreams, she never remembered a word she spoke when she awoke from her sleep. She would keep contending with her mind in order to recollect what they conversed.

Once, they met in a place nearby Sanjana's residence. They both were standing near the foot of a mountain that dwelled near her house. Sanjana inquired him, “Where are you coming from?”

He stretched his hand to show a place which was situated farther away from there. He indicated the chapel which was located near Sanjana's house wherein Father Lawrence was serving. When she awoke from the sweven, the memory of the event remained in her mind as fresh as the morning dew of Darjeeling.

Chapter 8 - Wait Until Time Mellows…

"This revelation is for a future time. It describes the end, and it will be fulfilled. If it seems slow in coming, wait patiently, for it will surely take place. It will not be delayed." - Habakkuk 2:3 (Holy Bible)

Diya asked her mother in the middle of the narration..

"Was there a boy like him in that chapel?"

Sanjana displayed a desperate smile, "I had never seen that boy before, neither in the chapel, nor in the whole of Darjeeling. Everyone told me that he is my hallucination. I apprehended that later as years passed.."

Diya and Sanjana were sitting in the Dining Hall. Diya rested her face on her palm, propping her elbow on the dining table, and was submerged in the story her mother was narrating.

As Sanjana spaded her memories that were buried deep in her heart, the blaze which was simmering silently until then began intensifying into a wildfire. Her voice quivered.. However, she continued with a trembling tone, with a hope that she would find solace after opening up with her daughter…

1988…

Unforgettable year for Jayaram Tagore. He faced a huge deflation and many challenges in his business that year. Because of a row between him and his partner, his business was split into two. He also had insurmountable debts. During such a bleak situation, Kailash's father Hari Govind Rao held his hand as a saviour and helped him. He had lent Tagore around one and a half million bucks without any interest. Had he not helped Jayaram Tagore at the right time, the Tagore family would have become penniless.

Niranjana was in grade twelve then. The Tagore family knew that she would score excellent marks in the board exam. Because her only ambition was to become a doctor, wasn't it? Nonetheless, Jayaram Tagore's financial situation was deprived. He was not even in a state to enroll her in BA in an arts college.

To everyone's amazement, Niranjana topped the board exam, she had scored first place in the whole of Kolkata. When she told her father that she wanted to pursue medicine in Britain, he shattered. Hari Govind Rao helped him again in such a dire strait.

Kailash's mother Celine, had got a slot for her in a medical college in Britain, through one of her relatives. She had also paid the admission and tuition fee for her for one academic year. She also booked her a flight ticket and sent her to the UK at her own expense. Jayaram Tagore and Maheshwari discussed among themselves about how they would repay the help that the Rao family rendered during their bleak circumstances.

A year of hard-work and endeavour assisted Jayaram Tagore to progress in his business. His financial status had also become better, he could now afford to pay the tuition fee of Niranjana. Tagore earnestly paid the debt in instalments to the Rao family, which enhanced the closeness between the two families furthermore.

1992, Sanjana was in grade ten. Her parents just wanted her to clear her board exams. They did not expect higher grades because of the mental struggles that she was dealing with. There was no progression in her. As many people suggested not to take sleeping pills, her parents thought of consulting a Psychologist to render her therapy and counselling instead of relying on pills.

Sanjana had evolved into a beautiful adolescent girl. She looked as beautiful as a golden idol which drew the attention of some human vultures that ogled around her in school and in her neighbourhood. As she had an unbreakable

comradeship with Kailash, some thought that they both were in love and hesitated to express their fondness for her. Additionally, Kailash had a lot of friends. The guys were also scared that Kailash and his friends would beat them blue if they made a fuss with Sanjana. Kailash protected Sanjana on several fronts.

Sanjana attended counselling sessions once a week with a Psychologist. As she was a woman, Sanjana felt free to divulge her heart. Each counselling session would last for an hour at minimum. Her father Jayaram Tagore would patiently wait for her in the reception area despite the hours it took.

This Psychologist also said what her previous Psychiater did.

“Sanjana, the dreams you perceive are hallucinations..”

“Yes, Madam. But those dreams have become my remedy, I love them as well…”

The Psychologist did not accept what she said. “You may like it, but it is contrived. You have to understand that firstly. You have to free yourself from the confusion that bothers you and the dream you think to be your remedy, as well. That is the real solution for your problem..”

Though the words uttered by the Psychologist agonised her, she knew what the lady said was right. She got that dream for the first time when she was six years old. Now she is sixteen years old. She has lived with that dream for ten years now. When she saw her Prince for the first time in her dream, he looked as though he was photocopied from her. He resembled just like her. Nonetheless, his face has also changed a little bit now. Which means, her fantastical Prince has also grown along with her.

“But honestly, Madam, even if I had not perceived him in my dreams, I would choose that face to be my most favourite face in the whole universe…”

Psychologist giggled aloud, “you, little woman! Doesn't your brain know what you really like? His face is an illusion created by your own brain reflecting your preferences. Would you not like it then?”

“Yes, of course..” Sanjana consented to it in her heart..

“That is why I am telling you, Sanjana, if you consider that the face is real, and begin to love it, you cannot live in this real world..”

Sanjana apprehended the verity in the Psychologist's words. For the first time in ten years, she wanted to get rid of the dream and never to see her fantastical Prince again..

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“You had that dream for the first time when you were in the chapel. Therefore, it could have been registered in your subconscious mind that the boy had come from a church. It could have reflected in your dream then…”

The logic in Father Lawrence's utterance seemed just to Sanjana. She had brought Kachori for him in a lunch box, prepared by her mother. Both were conversing and chowing down the Kachori, sitting in the chapel.

“It could be so, uncle..” replied her, reckoning about it..

“I think what the Psychologist says is true, Sanju dear.. You have to liberate yourself from the dream, it is my prayer, too.. Your father told me that there is some vish yog in your birth chart. I do not believe in astrology. But I wanted to know what it is. So I went to the library and referred some books..

“It is nothing, Sanju, the Moon and the planet Saturn were combined in one phase when you were born. So the darkness of Saturn affects the mind, which

is referred to as the Moon. This combination is called Vish yog in astrology. People who are affected by vish yog seem to struggle with confusion oftentimes. They say that bewilderment and depression are the effects of Moon-Saturn conjunction. However it is proved to be true in your case.

“Let us put aside the discussion concluding if it is factual or not according to science. There is one thing that you should be careful about. I learnt that people affected by vish yog are not good at making decisions, they are prone to make wrong decisions. You do not make that blunder in your life, Sanju dearie. Then you will have to suffer all throughout your life.

“There is a lovely verse in the Bible, ‘wait for the Lord..’

“If you are unable to make some decision, let the Lord guide you to decide what you need. Do not try to make up your mind in haste. Wait until you obtain that guidance, even if it gets late. God will never forsake anyone who awaits His guidance. It is my personal experience.

“Do not confuse yourself, Sanju.. You have to write the board exams this year, no? So concentrate only on your studies, now..”

The advice of the Father just reached her ears, her mind and eyes were gazing at the bench, laying two rows ahead of the bench in which they both were sitting. She met him for the very first time, ten years ago, while she was lying asleep on that bench…

Chapter 9 - You are He!

"Truth is not something outside to be discovered, it is something inside to be realised." - Osho

1993, February 01..

"Sanjana, there is a parcel for you.." Tukaram, the peon called Sanjana during the Bengali class.

Sanjana asked permission from her cranky Bengali teacher and went to receive the parcel. She patiently waited until the class was over and unwrapped the parcel curiously. Inside the carton was a cube shaped white color cube. It had holes on each side. Nothing was inside it. It cannot be opened.

Sanjana became annoyed as she saw it, she neither apprehended what it was, nor knew who sent it. She showed it to Kailash that evening while returning home in the school bus. "Do not receive such parcels.. What if someone has set a time-bomb inside it," threatened he.

Sanjana was in grade eleven that year. Kailash was in grade twelve in the same school. As she cleared her grade tenth board exams with quite good marks, she got the group she asked, in the same school.

The next day…

"Sanjana, a parcel is here for you to collect.." As Tukaram called again during the same Bengali class, the cranky Bengali teacher shot an evil stare at her.

As she was entangled with fear and confusion, she went to receive a package similar to the one that she received the previous day. The same cube. Sanjana

felt annoyed, “Who is that idiot, sending such parcels??” She groaned to her friends.

The third day…

“Sanjana, someone sent you a package today, too,” called the peon.. The same time, the same Bengali teacher…

“Get that parcel and get lost from here..” Shouted the cranky teacher. Sanjana quivered in fear..

“You, Tukaram! Why do you disturb her during my class everyday?” She rebuked the peon..

“The postman comes during this hour only, madam. What will I do?” replied the peon.

“No, madam. I am not going..” uttered Sanjana.

“Ok.. I will receive it. You get it from me after the school hours…” said the peon, and strode out with a groan, “I am the one to get the flaks..”

She received the parcel in the evening. Same package. Same cube. She felt riled. Kailash, who eyed the parcel in the bus uttered, “Valentine's Day is around the corner, isn't it? Someone is trying to convey his feelings for you.. I do not know who that martyr is..” Kailash teased her.

“I am going to let him have it when I know who he is!!” replied Sanjana furiously.

Those three cubes were able to be connected with each other. She placed the white colour cube in sunlight to check if she could see any words. However

she could see nothing. Though she was furious, she also became so eager to know who did this..

Even the Principal of the school learnt about the packages that were addressed to her. The Principal called Sanjana and inquired about it, “I do not know who sends it, madam. The sender's address is not written..” said she and cried. As the Principal knew that Sanjana was a very disciplined girl, she told her, “Well.. Fine, Sanjana.. Do not receive any such packages hereafter..” She nodded her head, affirming and went straight to Tukaram and said, “Bhaiya, do not receive any packages addressed to me,” and went home composed.

Nonetheless, she could not sleep that night. “Could it be him? Is he the one sending me those parcels? No.. It can't be.. He is my hallucination, isn't he? How can I get packages from someone who doesn't really exist??

“But.. What if he exists? What if he had chosen this Valentine's Day to convey his love for me? Alas! I told Tukaram not to receive those packages again.. How can I find out if he had sent me those parcels??” Sanjana forfeited her slumber that night..

The next day, as she was journeying in the school bus, Kailash sat next to her and gave the package that he had got from Tukaram the previous day, “I will find out who he is, even if you don't want to.. I told Tukaram that I would collect the parcels hereafter.. You don't worry, I will bring them..” Sanjana felt rejuvenated as she heard his words. Each day, she secured them from Kailash and connected those cubes.

1993, February 13..

The connected cubes were approximately two feet long and two feet tall. Only one cube had to be fixed in the middle. That place was empty. Sanjana waited curiously to collect that one cube..

1993, February 14, Valentine's Day…

Though it was a Sunday, Eleventh and Twelfth grade students were asked to come to school as their board exams were around the corner. Unlike other days, Sanjana awaited the arrival of Kailash with nervousness and curiosity in the school bus. Kailash hung his head down with sadness and uttered to her that no package was sent to her that day. Sanjana was disappointed and shocked to know it. She did not say anything and journeyed silently in the bus. Kailash noticed the disappointment in her face. As he did not want to disturb her, he did not say anything further till they reached their residence.

Sanjana felt void when she went home. She wept alone in her room, as her fantasy of meeting her dream Prince was shattered.. She consoled herself after a while and went into the kitchen to help her mother. She chatted with her grandmother for a while. She ate dinner and got ready to sleep. Meanwhile her mother called her, “Sanju, I forgot to tell you. A package was sent addressed to you. I have kept it in the closet.” Immediately after hearing her mother's words, her face became as bright as the full moon.

She scudded to the closet, took the package and opened it swiftly. The fourteenth missing cube was inside the carton along with a power cord. She connected it with the other cubes, plugged the cord into the socket and turned on the switch..

“Would you share the rest of your life with me?” the words sparkled. In the background, was a picture of a snow capped mountain.. She eyed it keenly.. It was Mount Kailash. Sanjana apprehended who sent it..

She turned back to see where the noise came from, her mother was staring at her irately. “I knew something was off when I received that parcel, without From address, on Valentine's Day.. Who sent it, Sanjana?” Mother inquired quite scathingly.

Sanjana replied in a trembling tone, “Kailash…”

Mother's face darkened with wrath, “I thought he was a good boy.. Let your father come home tonight..” she voiced and went into the kitchen. Sanjana was entangled with an inexplicable emotion. She liked Kailash so much. Not only her, he was the chocolate boy of their neighbourhood and their school. So numerous girls had a crush on him. He was that handsome. Furthermore, he was a well-disciplined, good guy. He had been friends with Sanjana for many years, yet, he never crossed the boundary. As per Sanjana, hadn't she met her Fantasy Prince, she would have accepted the love of Kailash immediately.

Sanjana was embroiled with various confusions, fear and fret. The two families, which were so close, living in harmony, are going to have a row, because of what Kailash did. What will happen if father knows? How can I face Kailash tomorrow in the school bus? How will I answer him?

Sanjana skipped classes for the next two days. She shut herself in her room. Even if someone talked aloud in her street, she would become anxious, “Are the two families fighting!!” and would peek through the window. But, to her surprise, both the families were talking as usual, their unity endured. It was perplexing for her.

On the evening of February the 16th, Niranjana called from London. Only Sanjana and her grandmother were at home then. Her parents had gone out. Niranjana asked Sanjana directly, “Hey, Sanju.. If you like Kailash, tell him that you like him. If you do not have feelings for him, tell him that you don't. He is under the weather because of the answer that you are about to tell. He kept pestering me to ask you if you like him or not..”

Sanjana flabbergasted, “What? Did he call you? Do you know what he did? He is going to shatter the unity between both our families, Niranju.. What if our parents know about it?”

Niranjana replied blithely, “They have discussed it already…”

Sanjana was shocked, “What? Have they discussed it already? Nobody asked me anything!!”

Niranjana continued, “Hmm, should they ask you? As if you are a grown up!! If you like him, accept his love. If you don't, tell him that you are not fond of him.. He is longing to know your answer, Sanju..”

“Well.. I shall talk to him tomorrow..” said Sanjana and hung up the phone.

The Fantasy Prince is the only one who stands as a barrier in between Sanjana and Kailash. Though she knew that he is an illusion, as per Sanjana, he has a face, a figure and feelings. “How can I perceive Kailash in his place? How can I meet him in my dreams if I accept Kailash's love? He is the one that came into my life, both as a remedy and as a Spring.. Let him be an illusion. I shall live with him only in my dreams. My heart and my life belong only to him. I do not care even if the whole world calls me a lunatic..” Sanjana decided determinately.

Grandmother was reading a book. Sanjana went to her grandmother, lied on her lap, took the hem of granny's saree and wiped off the tears that rolled down from her eyes. Grandmother noticed that Sanjana was crying, she placed the book aside and probed, “Sanju dearie.. Why are you crying? Do you not know what to tell Kailash?” Sanjana reposed as soon as she heard that question.

“Granny.. Do you know about it, as well?”

Grandmother chuckled, “I knew it the day before yesterday itself. I was talking to Celine just now. She asked me when I was going to send her Daughter-in-law to her home?”

“So, you all have decided everything, no, granny?”

Grandmother caressed Sanjana’s crown, “How will we decide without asking you? Both the families have already discussed it, Sanju. You are too young to think about it now. But Kailash proposed to you in haste, without telling us. Ok, tell me now. Do you like him or not?”

Sanjana said, wiping her tears, “It doesn't matter if I like him or not. You know that I like the boy I see in my dreams..”

Grandmother laughed aloud, “You, little fool! Is that your problem?”

Grandmother pointed to the picture of Lord Shiva which was hanging opposite her on the wall, “Who is he?” she asked.

Sanjana replied, “Lord Shiva!”

“Do you know what Lord Shiva will look like in person?” asked grandmother

Sanjana pondered, “No, granny. In each picture, his face varies. Who knows what he looks like in person? The artist who drew the picture, might have had this image in his mind while drawing Lord Shiva…”

Grandmother replied, “Likewise, God has created someone for you.. You have imagined what he would look like. But, he does not have to be the same as in your imagination! He came to live in this colony with his family. He got enrolled in the same school wherein you study. He is so much fond of you. If

you like him as well, then he is your Prince.. This is how it happens in real life, Sanju..”

Sanjana's face illuminated, “Are you sure, granny? Is Kailash the one that I see in my dreams?”

Grandmother uttered, “Yes, of course.. He is that Prince! I thought of it years ago, when you both would sit and listen to the fairytale that I tell. Did it happen without the will of God? It is all the work of God Almighty!”

Sanjana smiled happily.. Her heart was filled with an inexplicable felicity… “Oh.. Yes, granny..” She embraced her grandmother and kissed her, she kept laughing… She could not stop it..

1993, February 17…

Sanjana was sitting in the school bus. Kailash came and sat next to her as usual, with anxiety. She feigned anger, moved aside and she scowled.

Kailash sat silently..

“Thinking that it was a very creative proposal? Do you know how much I was stressed out because of you throughout these 14 days? You also acted excellently, Kailash, as if you do not know anything…” As Sanjana spoke irately, Kailash’s heart skipped a beat in nervousness.

“Sorry, Sanjana.. I thought you would like it…”

“What? My parents, the Principal, and the whole school came to know of it.. A troublesome proposal!! You, fool!!”

“I apologised, no? You have not told your answer, yet..”

“Oh.. So you want to know my answer now? You made me anxious for fourteen days, didn't you? Therefore, you have to wait for another fourteen days…” replied Sanjana angrily.

“I would wait for 14 long years, Sanjana.. Let alone 14 days..”

As Sanjana said, “Fine.. Then wait for 14 years.. I will tell my answer after giving it a long thought..” Kailash was appalled at her reply.

Sanjana, who was sitting on the window seat, turned her face towards the window and smiled in her heart. The cold breeze of Darjeeling, played with the tresses that trailed in her face. The breeze, along with the drizzle of rain, began to blow inside her heart, too…

Chapter 10 - New Kindreds…

"Sometimes the universe will send someone into your life just so that they can help you with the next part of your journey." - Mimi Novic

1994, May 13..

The love between Sanjana and Kailash has become even more ardent. Three months ago, they celebrated the first anniversary of their love. Within this one year, they both have shared a lot of utterance of love, kisses, gifts and vows.

Kailash has joined BBA in St. Antony's College in Darjeeling. Sanjana has completed her twelfth grade now. Her mental strife has become more vigorous in the past six months. She had been struggling much more than her past years. Her parents thought that it could be because of nervousness as she was going to write her board exams. However, the astrologer said that it is because of the occurrence of Ashtama Shani in her natal chart.

The astrologer told Sanjana's parents to give her a complete rest after she completes her board exams. She may be admitted to college two years after the passage of Ashtama Shani or she may suffer even worse from mental struggles.This worried her parents and Kailash's parents. Sanjana also wanted to take a break as she had dealt with so much troubles earlier. Therefore Tagore approved to let her rest at home and then continue her studies after two years, in 1996, when Ashtama Shani transits from her birth chart.

In the month of June, the board exam result was announced. Sanjana cleared her exams with average marks. Her parents celebrated it as she had passed the exams despite her struggles. They appreciated her that she endeavoured in such difficult circumstances and succeeded in her exams. Nonetheless,

they also had a concern, how she would get a slot in college to pursue her studies because of the average marks and two years academic gap.

Hari Govind Rao asked, “Sanju, what do you want to study?” Sanjana replied solicitously, “Computer Science, uncle..” “Do not worry, Sanju.. You will get a slot to pursue Computer Science, I am responsible for it.. If we can't, I shall open an Engineering college in Darjeeling for my Daughter-in-law to study,” said he. His utterance comforted Sanjana and made her happy.

Despite Sanjana's love for Kailash, even during the difficult times of Ashtama Shani, the Fantasy Prince acted as her remedy. Sanjana was not at all bewildered as she believed with all her heart that the Prince in her dream was Kailash in reality. She often thanked her grandmother for she cleared her from ambiguity and guided her along the right path. Each time she saw him in her dreams, she would tell Kailash the next day joyously, “Yesterday, you took me in a boat, we cruised in a beautiful river where colourful, vibrant fishes were swimming. We both played with those fishes…” Each time as she emphasised her dreams felicitously, Kailash would swamp in her words.

In this circumstance, Niranjana had completed MBBS in London and has completed her second year in Master of Surgery. She was about to visit India the following month for her holiday. Sanjana was exhilarated to meet her sister after a long time, unbeknownst of the twist that she was going to surprise them all with…

1994, August 20..

Two weeks before arriving India, Niranjana called her mother and told her a shocking news which hit the family like a bombshell. Niranjana told her that she was in love with a guy called Suresh who studied with her, who was from Madurai, Tamil Nadu. She was going to bring him home to get permission from her father

Tagore and Maheshwari were not fond of this. At the same time, they did not oppose Niranjana. In case of Sanjana-Kailash, both Tagore and Maheshwari approved of their relationship immediately. But in case of Niranjana they hesitated. Because, they knew Kailash since his childhood, they knew his family. They also knew that Rao's family was the best to give their child in marriage to. Nonetheless, regarding Niranjana, they do not know who Suresh was, what his family background was.

So Tagore decided something right away. He planned to go to Madurai along with Maheshwari, before Niranjana's arrival, see his family and tell Niranjana if she can bring Suresh home or not.

Suresh's father Arjunan was working as a Principal in a private college in Madurai. His wife was called Suganthi. Suresh had an younger brother called Sathish. He was doing his undergraduate first year in American College, Madurai.

Tagore spoke to Suresh on the phone. He formed a good impression of him the very first time they talked. Then he spoke to his father, Arjunan. Tagore and Maheshwari flew to Madurai the next day itself, met Suresh's family and returned home with utter satisfaction and happiness.

The marriage festivities began at Sanjana's home…

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Kailash and Sanjana were waiting in the Bagdogra airport to receive Niranjana and Suresh. Sanjana leaped in joy eyeing her sister from afar. Niranjana who was exhausted from a tiresome journey, revived at once as she saw her sister.. She came running.. They both embraced each other..

Niranjana introduced Sanjana and her fiance` to Suresh. Kailash brought his white Contessa car to receive them. As he drove, Suresh sat in the co-driver's seat, Niranjana and Sanjana sat in the passengers seat.

The travel from Bagdogra to Darjeeling was sweet and splendid. The beauty of nature was captivating. They stopped in the motels to have coffee and snacks. They also clicked a lot of photographs. Kailash had an obsession for photography. He would always take his Canon EOS 5 camera along with him wherever he goes.

They stoped their car in the midway at alluring places and the four of them took as many photos as possible. Suresh and Kailash were chatting as though they were acquainted before, which was admired by Sanjana and Niranjana sitting in the back seat. Suresh and Niranjana had fondly disputes frequently, Sanjana and Kailash laughed at them.

The relationship between Sanjana and Kailash was not so. Sanjana dominated in their relationship. Kailash would nod, 'OK, madam' to anything she said. As Sanjana had mental strife, Kailash's parents had told him never to hurt her. But, regarding Niranjana and Suresh, he would poke fun of her and she would answer him sarcastically, which was humorous and was filled with ardent love as well.

Suresh had planned to stay in Niranjana's house for two days and then leave to Madurai. The other three compelled him and made him to stay in Darjeeling for a week. Kailash, while driving planned a tour for the week. Their journey from Bagdogra to Darjeeling which was expected to last around two and a half hours, ended up lasting four hours.

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1994, December 24…

The marriage of Niranjana and Suresh was planned to be held on December 27 in Raja Muthaiah Hall, Madurai, by the elders. Therefore, the Tagore and The Rao family decided to go to Madurai on the 24th of December. As it was the season of Christmas, Father Lawrence had a lot of work in the chapel, and could not come to Madurai. Hence, he called Niranjana to the chapel, blessed her and presented her a gift. On the day of Christmas, a special prayer was also invocated for the wedding of Suresh-Niranjana, scheduled to take place in Madurai.

This was Sanjana's first time to visit South India. Tagore had planned to fly to Madurai. Nonetheless, Sanjana and Kailash were adamant that they wanted to take the train. So Tagore booked eight tickets for himself, Maheshwari, bride Niranjana, Sanjana, grandmother, Rao, Celine and Kailash in the first class.

They enjoyed their journey, chatting, joking, singing and dancing. They landed in Madurai junction on the 24th of December, early in the morning, around 7:30 am.

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“Ilam vayasu ponna
vasiyam pannum valavikkaran
nalla manasa thottu
mayanga vaikkum Madurai-karan…”

An AC van awaited outside the Railway station to pick up the bride's family. A song from a Tamil movie, Pandi Naatu Thangam, played aloud in the van. Suresh and his brother Sathish came to receive them. In the Madurai railway station, the signage “Madurai Junction” written in Hindi was smeared with tar. Sanjana showed it to Niranjana, to which she replied, “it happens here, Sanju. Suresh has told me..” As everyone hoped in, the driver reduced the

volume of the audio, the van travelled from Madurai railway station to Aarapalayam, where Suresh resided.

Everything was new to Sanjana. Though it was December, it was scorching hot in the morning itself. No Bollywood posters were seen. No Hindi songs were played, no pictures of Bollywood stars anywhere.. Their clothing were different.. She saw people in Saree, lungi and dhoties.. Different people, different culture.. A completely varied environment..

Sanjana probed Suresh, “Jiju.. Is this place in India?” He laughed, “Did you apply for a visa to come here? I felt the same when I came to your city.. It is the speciality of our Nation…” said he.

As they came to Arasadi, Suresh stopped the van in Hotel Gowri and bought coffee for everyone. “Uncle, our home is nearby. But try the coffee at this hotel..” said he. Everyone, including Sanjana got down from the van. In the Solaimalai Theatre nearby, a huge banner of Captain Vijayakanth was decorated with different garlands for the movie ‘Periya Marudhu.’ In that banner, Captain Vijayakanth was dressed in Dhoti, with bloodshot eyes, huge mustache and with a sickle in his hand, darting a furious glance. Sanjana looked up at that banner with amazement and inquired Sathish, “What's the name of this Hero?”

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The marriage ceremony of Suresh-Niranjana concluded joyfully. As Arjunan was a well-reputed person in Madurai, they organized the wedding in a grandeur manner. Banners were put up in many places in Madurai in order to wish the wedding couple Suresh-Niranjana. Many VIP guests came to wish the couple. Tagore and Maheshwari felt happy for their daughter.

Honestly, the Rao family was richer than Arjunan's family. Kailash who was astonished by the wedding of Suresh-Niranjana, told Sanjana that their

wedding should be exceptional and grand. But she did not like it, “Our wedding should be simple, Kailash. I don't want it to be magnificent. What matters is how we live after our wedding, not how grand the wedding itself is..”said she. Kailash, as usual, replied, “OK, madam” and became quiet.

Sanjana and Kailash toured Madurai. They tasted all the famous foods and drinks in Madurai, Suseeyam, Vadai, Parotta, Jigarthanda, Cotton seed milk and more. They spent hours in Madurai Meenakshi Amman Temple, Thirumalai Nayakkar Mahal and Rajaji park. They both liked the new vibe that they felt in Madurai. Kailash clicked a lot of photographs in his camera so as to remember the special moments that they spent there.

Everyone had to leave home after the wedding festivities were over. On the 30th of December, everyone embarked on the flight to Bagdogra. When they came to Madurai, Niranjana was with them in the train, they were chatting joyously. Now she is not with them. It was quite agonising for the family. The newly married couple, Suresh-Niranjana decided to stay in Madurai for a week and then go to London to pursue their third year in MS.

Sanjana and Kailash sat next to each other on the flight. Sanjana leaned on Kailash's shoulder and dozed off. Both of their hearts cudded their happy moments that they had in Madurai the past week.

Chapter 11 - Towards a Long Separation..

"Fate leads the willing and drags along the reluctant." — Seneca

1996, March..

It has been three years since Kailash and Sanjana fell in love with each other. And It has been two years since Sanjana discontinued her studies temporarily. Kailash has completed BBA. He has applied in a renowned college in Australia to study MBA. Surprisingly, he got a slot in that college. Kailash and Sanjana, both were happy about it, yet, they worried about the long interspace that awaited them.

As Ashtama Shani transited from Sanjana's natal chart, she was ready to continue her studies. Even though she tried to secure a place to study her favourite stream B. Sc Computer Science, she could not acquire it any college. In many colleges in Darjeeling, they asked for a huge amount of donation. However, her father and her future Father-in-law were ready to pay such substantial donation.

But Sanjana never demanded anything from anyone. It was her nature. During such a circumstance, Suresh came as a saviour to help her. If she could not acquire a slot anywhere, he said that he would arrange a slot for her in Tamilnadu College of Arts And Science For Women to study Computer Science, in which his father was working as a Principal. Arjunan also told Tagore, “I will take care of everything. Tell Sanjana to join here..”

Nonetheless, the Tagore couple were not interested in sending her that much afar because of their daughter's mental health condition. Yet, it remained as their final option. Sanjana decided to go to Madurai to pursue her studies if she could not get admission anywhere. Her parents deterred her from going

to Madurai, her grandmother wept thwarting her. But Sanjana was determined.

Suresh and Niranjana who spoke on phone from London endorsed Sanjana. “Send her, mom. My In-laws will take care of her..” said Niranjana. To which Maheshwari replied, “Satish is also of the same age as Sanjana. It is inappropriate to let her stay there…”

Suresh intervened and spoke to Maheshwari, “It's not a problem, aunty.. But because you are concerning, I'm saying this. Five stops away from her College, there is a place called Alagaradi wherein a Christian Theological College is located. There is a women's hostel inside that campus. My father's friends are working there. Sanjana can stay there and study, aunty..”said he.

Surmounting all the obstacles, Sanjana succeeded. As Tagore was busy, Kailash and Maheshwari decided to accompany Sanjana for her college admission. Grandmother was fuming, and did not talk to Sanjana for two days. “Talk to me, granny…” Sanjana said crying. Grandmother embraced her and cried, “Fine, Sanju dearie.. Study well.. I will keep waiting for you, clinging to my life, for three years until you finish your degree…” “I will come and visit you during my holiday, granny..” Sanjana comforted her. Grandmother was around 80 years old then.

1996, June…

Maheshwari, Sanjana and Kailash prepared to depart to Bagdogra Airport in a car. As Sanjana came from the chapel after visiting Father Lawrence to get blessings from him, the car set out straight to Bagdogra Airport.

The cheerful conversation that lasted during their last visit to Madurai, for the wedding of Niranjana was completely amiss this time. An inexplicable burden was troubling all the three of them. Kailash fretted so much about

how Sanjana would manage her mental turmoil there. He tried to speak normally with Sanjana and Maheshwari, withholding his tears.

Maheshwari kept crying all the way to Bagdogra Airport, wiping off her tears with the hem of her saree. Before reaching the Airport, she inquired Sanjana twice, “Are you sure about going to Madurai? Do you have to go?”

Sanjana was really not interested in studying in Madurai. Had Kailash stayed in Darjeeling, she would have chosen some other available course and would have remained in Darjeeling itself. Kailash would depart to Australia in a few days, Darjeeling without him appeared to be a Hellfire to her.. Instead of that, atleast she wanted to pursue her dream course in Madurai. That is why she was determined in her decision.

Her heart was in an excruciating anguish as she was tripidating how she would dwell in a different India, where the culture, language and people are different, staying away from her family and lover. She was certain about one thing, that her destiny was taking her to that place bridling her own self.

The Air India flight flew to the South, from Bagdogra Airport to Madurai via Chennai. Sanjana held Kailash’s hand tight, who was sitting next to her. She leaned on his chest. His heartbeat which pounded against her ears, made her realise that he was also facing the same anxiety just like her..

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Sanjana was standing in a flower haven. She has never seen such beautiful flowers anywhere in the world. The flowering plants were as tall as her. There is no word in any language to emphasise the aroma of those flowers.

Sanjana sought him amid those plants… He was not around.. She called him aloud… He did not come.. Her face darkened in worry… Suddenly he came in an unexpected time, pushing the flowers with a vibrant, blossoming face.

He had a handful of golden flowers. He extended his hand and bestowed those flowers to her. She feigned anger and strode from there, she sat on an ice-cold rock. A stream was flowing near that rock.

He came there and stretched his hand which was full of ruby red flowers, and she turned her face aside. He suddenly vanished from there..

She knew that he would come certainly. So she sat on the rock and sang some lovely song. Suddenly, flowers cascaded over her. She turned to see him. He brought many basketfuls of colourful flowers and showered her with them, she began laughing…

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“Sanju… What happened?”

Kailash shook her. Sanjana awoke startled… It was midnight.. The flight was flying across the sky silently.. The lights of the airplane were turned off… All the passengers were in a deep slumber..

The laughter of Sanjana had waken up all the passengers nearby. “What happened, Sanju?” Her mother probed. “Nothing, mummy..” replied Sanjana. She felt ashamed..

Everyone, including her mother, fell asleep once again. Kailash whispered in Sanjana's ears, “Why did you laugh aloud like a ghost, threatening everyone in the midnight?”

As Sanjana got close to his ears and whispered her dream, he listened to it enthusiastically, held her chin tight and placed an ardent kiss on her lips..

Chapter 12 - You Have Stripped My Life Away…

An invisible red thread connects those who are destined to meet regardless of time, place or circumstance. The thread may stretch or tangle, but it will never break.
- Chinese Proverb

Tamilnadu College Of Arts And Science For Women..

Sanjana liked the the campus very much, which was located at KK Nagar, Madurai. As they were relatives of the Principal, the staff in the college made the admission process quite easier for them. Arjunan also consented that the women's hostel inside the campus of Christian Theological College was much better than the women's hostel inside his college campus.

They completed the admission procedure before 10 am. Arjunan took Maheshwari, Kailash and Sanjana in his car to the Theological College campus. Within 15 minutes, their car reached Alagaradi, the place where the college is located. Arjunan explained Sanjana that she could reach the college from Alagaradi within 20 minutes, if she boarded the bus in this bus stop.

Annai Fatima Theological Seminary…

The college which was called Seminary looked like a beautiful garden with dense trees. Though it was located near the Alagaradi main road, if one enters the college campus, they could only hear the chirping of birds and insects that dwell in those trees. The buzzing noise of the vehicles cannot be heard inside. The campus was filled with such silence. As no vehicle was allowed to cross the security post in the entrance, Arjunan parked the car in the parking area and the four of them walked inside the campus. In the entrance, onto the right of the security post, ‘Annai Teresa Women's Hostel’ signage which was put on a huge building located first, welcomed them. Sanjana walked into it with curiosity as she was going to reside in it for the next three years.

Barrel shaped percussion instrument called ‘Thavil’ and double reed wind instrument called ‘Nadaswaram’ were played in the chapel, and worship was done in lucid Tamil. The chapel was located at a certain distance from the hostel. The four of them, including Arjunan, were waiting in the reception for the arrival of Sister Nesamani who was the warden of the hostel.

Sister Nesamani came to the reception after the worship was over, and welcomed the four of them to her chamber. She explained the protocols of the hostel to Sanjana and got signatures from Sanjana, her mother Maheshwari and her guardian Arjunan. After receiving the advance payment from them, she called the caretaker Victoria to take her and show her the hostel room No. 21.

Sanjana and Maheshwari followed Victoria into the hostel. It was a double occupancy room in which a Keralite girl called Bobby George, who studies in Thiyagaraja Engineering College was staying. Victoria told Sanjana that she has to share the room with her. As Bobby had already left to college, that room was closed. Victoria opened the room with a spare key. Sanjana and Maheshwari went inside the room, they both liked it.

They told warden Nesamani that Sanjana would stay in the hostel from tomorrow evening and the four of them took their leave.

Kailash and Maheshwari had to leave to Darjeeling the very evening. Sanjana never stayed outside leaving her family. She is going to stay in her new relative's home for the very first time in her life. She was frightened at the thought of it. She has to go to college tomorrow. Her life is going to journey in a new path. Therefore, she wanted to spend her day happily with Kailash till evening. They both planned to visit their favourite spot, the Meenakshi Amman Temple.

Kailash told Suresh's brother Sathish, “Sanjana and I are going to visit Meenakshi Amman Temple, we will come to the airport at 7 pm sharp. You bring Maheshwari aunty to the airport around that time and bring my luggage along with you.” They planned to drop Kailash and Maheshwari in the airport and return in the car to Arjunan’s home with Sanjana, Sathish and his mother Suganthi.

Sanjana and Kailash hired a taxi and went to Hotel Aryabhavan and ate their lunch there. Then they went to the Meenakshi Amman temple. It was 2:30 when they finished offering their prayers. Then they chatted for an hour inside the temple. From the spot that they were sitting, they could clearly see the shrine tower of Lord Sundareshwarar.

Kailash told Sanjana pointing to the tower, “We both shall circle around the shrine tower 99 times and plan our wedding while circling it. You should not change the plan that we have proposed in the shrine of God.. What do you say?”

Sanjana showed thumbs up and said “deal OK!”

They both began circling the outside of the pinnacle from right to left..

First round..

Kailash uttered, “Look, Sanju.. I will complete my MBA in Australia in 1998, and I will begin working there. You will complete B. Sc in 1999. I would have worked for a year then. I will earn and I shall rent a nice house for us and buy us a car.. After you complete your degree, we shall get married in 1999 and move to Australia.. It is upto you to study further or go for a job..”

Sanjana replied, “OK, then we are getting married in 1999…”

Second round..

Kailash began, “Our wedding should be held in Tirupati Venkateswara temple as per the will of my father.. We can have our reception function in Darjeeling..”

Sanjana replied, “OK.. Agreed..”

Third round…

Sanjana spoke, “We should get the first blessing after our wedding only from my grandmother.. Because she is the major reason for our unison…”

Kailash, “Sure.. Agreed…”

Likewise, for each round, they planned their wedding compliantly. During the 30th round, as though something got into Kailash, for he voiced something unnecessary…

“Sanjana, we are planning our wedding gladly now.. You are going to study in Madurai for three years.. Will you fall for some Tamil guy just like your sister did? Will you sling my hook, Sanju?”

Sanjana enraged at once, she felt as though she could give him a tight slap. She thought to herself, “No, we are in a temple. I should not make a fuss here… I should give him an answer which would make him worry why he asked this girl such a question…”

Sanjana replied nonchalantly, “Kailash, do you know something? Tamil guys are very honest and sincere when it is about love.. They are bold enough to give their life for the one who they adore… My sister has told me.. Pray to God that I should never see someone like that before I complete my course.. If I get to see a guy like that, I will certainly sling your hook…”

Kailash did not expect such a reply from her. He was left dumbfounded and could not respond. He was irate and was about to weep at the same time. He withheld all his emotions and walked silently.

The two of them who were talking jubilantly until then, did not talk during the 31st and 32nd rounds. She felt aggrieved, “Shucks!! I should not have said that.. If what Kailash asked was wrong, what I replied was wrong, too.. Let me apologise..” she thought to herself..

33rd round..

“Hey, Kailash!”

“Kailash!!”

Kailash, “Hmmm, tell..”

Sanjana cooed, “Are you angry?”

Kailash replied furiously, “Nope..”

Sanjana, “Sorry, baby.. I got offended by your question.. That is why I replied hurting you..”

Kailash remained silent.

“Why did you ask me that question, Kailash? Can I ever imagine someone in your place? When I finish my degree in Madurai and come to you, I will come only as your Sanjana…You don't go after some white woman in Australia!!”

Kailash cooled down and chuckled…

Sanjana, “Who on earth can win my heart as you did, Kailaa…”

Before she could complete the sentence..

She felt as though a thousand thunders struck her head as she saw the scene…

She could not believe her own eyes…

He came opposite to her, standing in between his two friends, chatting and giggling… Her dream boy.. Her Fantasy Prince.. Same face, same figure, same smile, the same ditto teeth alignment, his body language was also in the same way that she sees in her dreams.. He had quite long hair, which was cut in a quite stylish way, as she perceives in her dreams… He stroked his hair elegantly which was ruffled by the wind and walked past her within some seconds without noticing her..

In that instant, as her brain voiced, "He is the ditto of my Fantasy Prince.. No difference at all..." her soul screamed inside her.. "Alas! It's him!!" Within some moments, he had walked past her..

She felt at that instant as though her soul uprooted from her body and went behind him… She fell on the floor like a lifeless tree…

“Sanjanaaa!!!” screamed Kailash..

A huge crowd gathered around them.. People came forward to help her.. Water was splashed on Sanjana's face.. Some stranger got a cup of lemon juice and extended it to her.. A woman fanned for her with the hem of her saree.. Another grandmother applied sacred ash on Sanjana’s forehead.. Sanjana came to her senses.. She startled as she saw a large crowd around her.. Her head was hit on the floor as she fell down.. Fortunately, there was no injury, but she had an excruciating pain in her head where she had banged..

On the other hand, the soul in her was dancing in an unparalleled joy.. As she looked up, Kailash was kneeling before her anxiously.. Sanjana reposed and yelled, “Kailash!!” and hugged him tightly.

Sanjana felt two different persons in her for the very first time. One was experiencing joy unlike before as she had seen the counterpart of her soul.. The other, who loves Kailash dearly and pities for him. She did not know who the real Sanjana is in between these two…

As she came to her senses and reposed, the gathering began dispersing. Sanjana embraced Kailash tightly, leaned on his shoulder and cried aloud. He took her out from the crowd, and seated her in a peaceful place and comforted her. He did not know what happened to her abruptly and why she was weeping all of a sudden.

Around 5 pm, they both exited the temple. Kailash took her to a coffee shop. Sanjana felt as if her brain stopped working. She could not comprehend anything. She was wondering if the scene she saw some minutes before was real? Was he real? Is he dwelling here? Has destiny brought me here to see him, to unite me with him? What will happen to Kailash then?

Kailash was asking her something. But her ears did not listen to anything. He thought that his lover was fretting about their separation for three years. So he did not want to bother her and remained quiet until they reached the airport. He hired a taxi to drop them in the airport.

The sorrow of sundering Kailash was troubling Sanjana from the last week itself. However, the reason for her to keel over today was, the one she thought to be her illusion, came in front of her as flesh and blood… The fear of what is going to happen for the next three years was pulling her consciousness. Kailash saw her anxiety, he laid her down on his lap and caressed her hair. The way he fondled her hair uttered without any voice, “I

am here with you under any circumstances..” Their taxi progressed amid the traffic, in the narrow, dusty roads towards the airport.

Maheshwari, Sathish and Suganthi were already waiting for them in the airport. After having their supper in the cafeteria inside the airport, Maheshwari and Kailash prepared to leave. Sanjana embraced her mother and her boyfriend and wept. With a burdened heart Maheshwari and Kailash turned and looked at Sanjana while progressing on the escalator, and they disappeared in a while..

Sanjana felt as if she was left alone as they vanished from her sight. She was distressed to have decided to study in Madurai. While returning home in the car, Sathish spoke, “Sanjana, as you are a first year student, your seniors will rag you. If anyone asks anything about you, tell them that you are the Principal's relative.. They will not bother you then.. I have a friend called Vanitha, who is your senior.. Go, meet her tomorrow…” said he.

A separate chamber was provided for Sanjana in Arjunan's home. Various thoughts tided inside her brain. Him, who vanished within a moment like lightning, separation of Kailash, homesickness, the expectations of the first day of college, she is obliged to stay in the hostel from tomorrow, the first time of staying away from home.. Everything altogether deprived her of slumber.

In spite of all these worries, her soul was in a tranquil state as though it received peace through thousand years of penance.. Because, its search for a lifetime has come to an end from that day…

Chapter 13 - Pandya Kingdom's Red Carpet Welcome for the Princess of Bengal

"We recognize our counterpart of the soul by the supreme level of comfort and security we feel with that person." - Richard Bach

Sanjana went to the college the next day with Arjunan. As she had to stay in the hostel from the evening of the day, she put her luggage in the car boot. She met Vanitha, her senior who was Sathish's friend. She went to the hostel that evening along with Arjunan.

Sanjana introduced herself to her roommate Bobby George, who was from Ernakulam, Kerala. She was a second year B.Tech student in Thiyagaraja Engineering college. Their friendship blossomed from their first encounter. Though she was happy about having a friendly roommate, her heart rimmed with the thoughts of the incident that happened in the Meenakshi Amman temple the previous day.

At the thought of him, she was entangled with inexplicable joy and unfathomable bewilderment simultaneously. She was thinking that he was the shadow of Kailash, but when she saw him as a real person, her heart kept grilling her if her consort would be Him or Kailash? Her soul advocated for him, while her conscience advocated for Kailash.

Her conscience won at last. 'Amid any circumstance, my heart and every fibre of my being, belong only to Kailash. Even if the guy who I saw yesterday, comes in front of me and proposes me, I would never disavow my promises to Kailash. I will never ruin his trust in me.'

However, Sanjana found herself thinking about him as much as she wanted to forget him. 'Will I see him if I go out from the hostel? Will I witness him if I

board the bus? Will I catch sight of him in the avenues?' she was encapsulated by many such dreads.

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Second day in college..

"Who is that girl? Fair as snowflake!! She's been wandering inside our campus from yesterday.." expressed a senior girl.

"Might be a new admission.." said another girl.

"Call her!"

"Hey, red T-shirt! Come here!" called out the third girl.

The way they called her, appeared to Sanjana as the peak of unculturedness. Seven to eight senior girls gathered under a tree. Sanjana repressed her anger and went towards them.

"Who are you? What are you doing here?"

A girl asked as if she was interrogating an accused.

"I am a relative of the Principal, Mr. Arjunan. I am a fresher."

A girl in black salwar inquired in a threatening tone, "Oh, shouldn't we rag you if you are the Principal's relation? Hey, girls.. Come here.. Madam is the Principal's relative, it seems.." she called the other senior girls who were standing here and there. They all gathered around Sanjana.

Sanjana, who was standing boldly until then, became anxious, “You, foolish Sathish! I shouldn't have listened to your advice.. I used your father's name and got ensnared here..” she groaned in her heart.

“What is your name?” a senior gathered then asked her.

As she sought around to see if Vanitha could come to help her, another girl portended, “Hey, we are asking you! What are you looking for there? Hey..don’t you know English? What's your name?”

“Sss.. Ss.. Sanjana Tagore…”

“What…Sanjana..? Tagore?? Are you the granddaughter of the man who wrote our National Anthem??”

“Nope..” replied Sanjana.

“There is a Hindi actress.. Who? The one who shows dimples when she smiles..?”

“Sharmila Tagore..” said a bespectacled girl.

“Is she your relation?”

“Nope..” nodded Sanjana.

“So neither Rabindranath Tagore nor Sharmila Tagore is your relative.. And you are claiming that our Principal Arjunan Sir is your relation.. And you are saying that your name is Sanjana Tagore.. Do we look farcelike to you??”

Sanjana did not know the answer to that stupid question.. She wanted to become Michelle Yeoh at that moment to hit them all..

“Where are you from?”

“Darjeeling..”

“What? Are you from Darjeeling? The place where people ski on snow covered mountains!! That place, huh??”

Sanjana stood quietly.

“Show us how to ski..”

“Here? There's no snow here..” Sanjana voiced in a pathetic tone.

“Where can we go for snow in this sunbelt Madurai? Do you want us to install a movie set for you to ski? Consider this sand as snow and ski now, go touch that entrance gate and come..”

“Hey, girls! she may run away as if touching the door…” said a girl.

“You, there! Touch the gate and come back here!! Or else you cannot enter the college tomorrow!” threatened a tall girl.

Sanjana’s legs trembled in fear. As the Principal Arjunan's car came honking, the assembly of girls dispersed from there at once.. Sanjana was standing alone..

Arjunan comprehended the situation and stopped the car there, he asked, “What happened, Sanjana?” She began crying without uttering anything..

Arjunan consoled her and seated her in the car, “You could have told them that you are a relation of the Principal..”

Immediately Sanjana stopped crying and darted a gaze at him.. He did not know the meaning of that gaze..

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Sanjana had spent three months in Madurai.. The seniors who ragged her have become her friends now. Her fluency in English made her famous in the college within a month. She became the compere for all the programmes in the college.

The senior girl who asked, “Don't you know English? What's your name?” was beseeching the help of Sanjana to write her an essay, to deliver a speech on Teacher's Day celebration.

Kailash was residing in Melbourne. He would speak to her on the phone during the weekend. There was a telephone booth inside the seminary. A guy called Annadurai was working there. Sanjana bribed him and asked him to call her immediately if she gets any STD and ISD calls. Therefore, she never missed any phone calls.

Sanjana did not see him again in those three months, after encountering him in the Meenakshi Amman temple. She felt calm and peaceful. The effect of that event on her gradually deteriorated. ‘He might be someone who just resembles my Fantasy Prince. I was terrified of such a simple thing. It is not unusual to see people with the same resemblance in the world!!’

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Sanjana went to her native and returned after her first semester holidays. The days that she spent with her parents and grandmother solaced her. She did not tell anyone that she saw a guy in Madurai who looked like her Fantasy Prince.

She was now accustomed to Madurai. She also learnt some Tamil words and began using them while speaking. She also joined a computer academy in Simmakkal, Madurai to study a computer course. Months passed, and Sanjana did not see him again. The fear of encountering him again has also diminished in her.

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Sanjana has completed her first year in B.Sc. She has obtained more than 75% marks. When she went to Darjeeling this time, for her semester holidays, Niranjana and Suresh also came there. The vacation was spent blissfully. But everyone felt that they missed Kailash a lot.

Sanjana's second academic year commenced. She has completely gotten rid of the fear of seeing him. 'Were it 'him,' certainly destiny could have helped me to meet him again. It has been a year, and I did not witness him again. Therefore, surely he cannot be from Madurai. He must be a tourist, he must have come to visit Madurai,' she thought to herself as she first witnessed him in the Meenakshi Amman temple.

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1997, August 27, 3:30 pm…

Sanjana was on her way to the hostel, she was at Alagaradi bus stop. She was wearing an elegant baby pink salwar. She tucked her dark brown into a ponytail. She was quite exhausted as she had so much writing work in college that day.

She was pondering something while going to the hostel. She suddenly felt a tingly sensation… A guy in full sleeve black tee and black jeans walked ahead of her. When he outpaced her, the spine-tingling feeling shot up…

He walked three yards ahead, turned behind and darted a scrutinising glance...

Sanjana felt as though someone shook her quintessence.. It was him..

This time, he saw her too..

He walked some feet ahead and espied her again..

Sanjana's heartbeat hastened.. Her legs refused to walk.. On the other hand, the happiness that she feels while perceiving him in dream, she felt as if the same happiness, multiplied by several times was showered inside her..

He strode forward and beheld her for the third time.. Then he went inside the campus of the seminary..

Sanjana was appalled.. Why is he entering the campus wherein I reside? Why did he look at me repeatedly?

Her pulse lapsed…

Chapter 14 - Do You Know Me Earlier As Well??

"Your soul knows the geography of your destiny. Your soul alone has the map of your future, therefore you can trust this indirect, oblique side of yourself. If you do, it will take you where you need to go." - John O'Donohue

After two days, she witnessed him in the same place at the same time. This time he approached her from the opposite direction. He fixated on her.

It continued for the next two days. He came towards her while she went to the college at 7:50 am, and also in the evening while she returned to the hostel at 3:30 pm. It happened everyday. Not only while going and returning from the college but also while she headed from the computer academy, thrice in a week around 6 pm. This made her dubious. She understood that he had been stalking her.

There were two hostels inside the campus of the seminary for the scholars who were studying to become priests. Apart from that, there was a women's hostel for the ones who were studying in other colleges, wherein Sanjana was staying. In that locality, there was a men's hostel for the students who study in other colleges. It was called, 'Mahatma Jyotirao Phule Men's Hostel.' Wealthy guys from other districts and states who were doing Medical and Engineering courses stayed in that hostel. Many of those guys were fascinated with Sanjana. They were longing to talk with her and win her heart.

Around eight boys who were residing in that hostel conveyed their love to Sanjana. Furthermore, there were many other local guys who never spoke to her but followed her in the bus. Sanjana would tell on their faces in a straightforward manner, that she is committed. She would show them the picture of Kailash and her, which she carries in her wallet. She would tell them that they both were in love for six years and Kailash was her fiance`.

Most of those boys would retract after knowing that she has a handsome boyfriend, therefore she would not fall for them.

But in the case of her Fantasy Prince, she kept convincing herself with irrational excuses and deceived herself. She thought that he could be a new occupant who inhabited the Jyotirao Phule hostel that year. She thought that he might have had a crush on her just like the other guys. Nonetheless, even her subconscious did not agree with her reasons.

Once when he was forging ahead of her, Sanjana eyed him before he crossed her. The very moment she looked into his eyes, her vitality thawed. Because, as though someone who seeks for his lost counterpart for epochs has finally discovered it, how ecstatic would he be! She observed the same surmounting joy in his eyes. His eyes held no hint of lust. His platonic gaze penetrated into Sanjana's eyes and shook her quintessence. She comprehended clearly.. “He certainly knew me in advance, just like how I know him.. Or else that sort of gaze is impossible..”

Sanjana anticipated to behold him unbeknownst of herself. Her eyes automatically began searching for him if he had not come. He had occupied the whole of her heart. She envisioned his face everywhere. She panged herself most times. She was upset with God. She nagged her grandmother in her heart. “If granny had not convinced me then, I would have been the happiest person in the whole world!” the moment she ruminated, her conscience accused her ruthlessly. “You are falling for him! Are you going to leave Kailash in a lurch?” her conscience warned her impetuously.

After she envisaged him in her dream when she flew to Madurai, she perceived him in her dreams only twice that whole year. Because she concentrated more on her studies and had no time to confuse herself with other thoughts. After she witnessed him, her mental struggles began assailing her once again. However, she was now mature enough to curb her mental strife, hence she did not faint easily like before.

That November, Sanjana cut her hair short, similar to Princess Diana's iconic style. During those days, it was rare to see women with such hairstyles in Madurai. Sanjana appeared not only exceptional but elegant as well as exquisite in that coiffure.

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Anyone who goes to the seminary has to cross the Annai Teresa Women's hostel. Because the hostel was located close to the security post. One day Sanjana was having her coffee and was chatting with her friends on the terrace of the hostel. He came out from the seminary at that time. Her friends who saw him from the terrace talked about him.

“Hey, girls! Who's that guy? He looks stunning and the way he dresses is so cool!!”

Another girl said, “His name is Vijay.. He's from Madurai it seems. He's doing some religious course in this seminary. Moreover, he's an orphan, girls… He grew up in a church…”

Sanjana perspired profusely as soon as she heard it. She remembered at once, during her juvenile days, when she asked him in her dream, “Where are you from?” He showed the church. That incident crossed her mind.

I should not deceive myself here after… What the Physiatrist and Psychologist said were false. He is not an illusion created by my brain. What my grandmother said is false, too. He is not the shadow of Kailash. He is real. His name is Vijay. He is from Madurai. That means, my dreams are not concocted, they are not my hallucinations. There is some supernatural truth behind my dreams. There is some metanatural relationship between him and me. I can apprehend that. But.. What is that relationship? They say connections from past lives.. Is it something like that? He certainly knows me

earlier just like how I knew him previously. How is it possible? What does he know about me? Who am I? Who is he? What is that haven in which we meet each time?

Vijay.. Vijay.. Vijay.. The moment from which she heard his name, it intermingled with her heartbeat…

Chapter 15 - Infant Found at the Feet of the Divine

"And when I (The Lord) passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live." - Ezekiel 16:6 (Holy Bible)

Vijay completed B.A - Religion, Philosophy and Sociology in the American College, Madurai in 1996. After one year break, he has joined M.A - Religion and Philosophy in Annai Fatima Seminary. He was in his first year of pursuing the MA degree. He took the bus everyday to the college from Ilandhaipatti, a rural area which was located 12 km afar from Madurai. He was the adopted son of Father Isaac Mariyan, who serves as a priest in a small chapel in Ilandhaipatti.

During December of 1976, Father Isaac Mariyan was a youngster who worked as an assistant priest in a massive cathedral in Madurai. He had a habit of waking up at 4 am in the morning to seek God in his prayers. One day, around 4:30 am in the morning, he heard bawling of a baby outside the church. He swiftly came out of the church to see a newborn wrapped in torn clothes, which was laid under the statue of crucified Jesus on Cross in the entrance of the church. The tiny neonate was trembling in cold.

The vicar of the cathedral and the parish priest of the diocese discussed and decided to entrust the baby to the diocesan orphanage. Nonetheless, Father Isaac was stubborn that he would raise the baby himself as he discovered the extraordinary infant in the feet of God Almighty. He faced many troubles because of his decision.

As the people who resented him spread rumours that the baby might be his own illegitimate child, he was anguished and asked for transfer and joined as a priest in a chapel in Ilandhaipatti.

In the late 80's, due to war in Sri Lanka, refugees from there were provided shelter in the Housing Board of Tamilnadu, at Koodal Nagar, Madurai. Father Isaac Mariyan served among them. Many literate youngsters were there among those refugees. He helped them to acquire special Visas for refugees so that they could secure jobs in England. People who went to work there, settled there and became wealthy. They stay in regular contact with Father Isaac until now without forgetting how he helped them in their desperate straits.

Father considered it as one of the ways to serve God. He never expected any payback or compensation. To the ones who wanted to remunerate him, he asked for only one thing; "I don't want anything. However, when Vijay completes his studies, please help him to secure a job and settle in England." Those who received his help were ready to reciprocate.

Bit by bit, he built up his savings from his earnings. He had saved Rs. 50,000, which he bequeathed to Vijay and told him, "Go and join a computer course in Aptech, Madurai. Only if you study in a good Institute, you can get a job in the UK," he compelled Vijay. He refused to do that course as he did not want to spend that much bucks. Even though Vijay truly wanted to settle in the UK, he desired more to stay by Father Isaac's side and wanted to look after him until the end. As Father obliged him to do a computer course, he joined a small academy in Koodal Nagar, Madurai and studied during the weekends.

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Vijay did his schooling in Government Higher Secondary School, Alanganallur, which was located on a rugged, crooked hill. The medium of instruction was Tamil in the Government school. Therefore, when he went to the American college to pursue B.A, he was terrified to see students from cities who were so proficient in English. Hence, he developed inferiority complex.

In order to eradicate his self-deprecation, Father Isaac took him to a beauty salon and let him have a stylish haircut and escorted him to Trends showroom which was situated opposite to the American college and bought him jeans and tees that he liked. The way he selected his garbs fascinated Father. Vijay was innately very talented, he was a skillful artist and also a gifted wordsmith who was capable of writing songs and essays and stories in Tamil. Father used to sing his praise songs during worship hours in the chapel. His artistic creativity was reflected in the way he selected his apparels, too. Sooner, "We should dress like Vijay!" admired his college-mates.

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1997, December 18…

Sanjana's senior Vanitha was sitting along with her boyfriend Melne, opposite to Vijay in the cafeteria of the Mahatma Jyotirao Phule hostel. He toppled, taken aback by what Vanitha uttered.

"Sanjana is in a committed relationship with a guy called Kailash. She found herself in love with him during her 11th grade itself. He is studying in Australia now. Once Sanjana completes her degree in Madurai and return to Darjeeling, certainly they both will get married.."

Melne was from Kerala. He resided in the Mahatma Jyotirao Phule hostel to pursue M.Sc in Visual Communication in Annai Fatima Theological Seminary. Even though it was a Theological college, Visual Communication Courses from Madurai Kamaraj University were held there. Vanitha and Melne were lovers. Vanitha was a Tamil girl from Madurai. Melne acquainted with Vijay as they met frequently in the cafeteria. They both became good friends later. Vijay told Melne that he had feelings for Sanjana. Melne already knew Sanjana through Vanitha. He also knew that she was committed. But, as

Vijay was so genuinely in love with her, Melne thought that if Vijay knew of Sanjana's relationship through her friend Vanitha, he would perhaps understand.

“Sanjana is so firm in her relationship, Vijay. Therefore, it is good for you to forget her… You will find someone even better in the future..” as Vanitha consoled Vijay, he sat in front of her like an inanimate corpse..

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“He is wholeheartedly in love with you, Sanjana. Though he looks trendy and modern, he does not know to speak English at all.. That is why he hesitates to talk with you.. But, he is a very decent, good-natured guy.. He cannot bear the truth that you cannot be his.. I do not know how he will get over you..”

After meeting Vijay in the cafeteria, Vanitha met Sanjana the very afternoon and relayed the news to her. Sanjana was sitting like a desolate tree.

“Did he explain any reasons behind his feelings of love for me?”

“Are you a fool? What reason could there be for a boy to fall in love? He likes you.. Therefore, he loves you..”

Sanjana remained quiet..

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Even after knowing that Sanjana was in love with Kailash, Vijay did not move on from her. He continued to walk ahead of her while she went to and returned from college, eying her. Sanjana informed that to Vanitha. Melne rebuked Vijay harshly.

“I thought you were a respectable man. That is why I called my girlfriend to talk to you about Sanjana. Even after knowing that she is committed to someone, it is not fair to shadow her, Vijay..”

Vijay responded on a calm tone, “I did not disturb her, Melne. I just look at her face and walk past her.. What is the problem with that? I cannot move on from her, never will I forget her.. You cannot comprehend even if I tell you the reason...”

Honestly, Vijay never disturbed Sanjana. He never pestered her by stalking her. He never nagged her to talk to him. He did not send her love letters, did not attempt to phone her.. He never did anything to bother her, except witnessing her while crossing the route, twice a day.

Sanjana wanted to talk with Vijay. She was curious to know about him. Just like the way she knew him earlier through her dreams, she was eager to know how he knew her in advance. Her heart was filled with many such desires. Nonetheless, she was bound by a single magical spell called, “Kailash!” Sanjana contemplated that even thinking of anyone other than Kailash was a sin..

Chapter 16 - Just Forget Me Kailash, Please…

"Love is of all passions the strongest, for it attacks simultaneously the head, the heart, and the senses." - Lao Tzu

From the day Vijay knew that Sanjana's mother tongue was Bengali, he began learning Bengali from a teacher in Krishnapuram Colony. Melne learnt about this and was truly fascinated. Melne had finished his studies in Madurai and went back to Kerala. He was looking for a job there. The matter that Vijay was learning Bengali spread to Melne through his juniors who were studying in the seminary. This unyielding love of Vijay seemed insane to Melne. The affair of Vijay learning Bengali reached Sanjana through Vanitha, who was informed by Melne. Her heart started to thaw for Vijay..

1998 November…

Vijay recently knew that Sanjana was studying in the Aptech Academy, at Simmakkal, Madurai in the evening batch, from 3:00 to 5:00 pm. "Shucks.. I should have joined Aptech when Father told me.. Have I enrolled in there earlier, I would have met Sanjana a year ago.. I could have been in her batch.." he anguished himself.

The reason why Vijay refused to get Rs. 50,000 from Father Isaac was, he thought that Father would need it in the future in case of health emergency, or the money might be beneficial for the affairs of the chapel. He also contemplated that he should not use the money that Father saved diligently. But today, love rendered him blind. He received money from Father, telling him that he was going to enroll in Aptech.

Aptech Academy was located on the first floor of a shopping complex at Simmakkal, in Madurai. As soon as Vijay ascended the stairs and arrived at the academy's reception, he noticed Sanjana sitting inside the glass-walled

lab. She was wearing a red Lacoste tee, which she wears often, paired up with blue jeans. Vijay became aware that Sanjana had seen him from the lab. His heart was buoyed in immense joy as he had gotten an opportunity to sit beside the Love of his Life.

The weekend class in Aptech commenced. Vijay forfeited his slumber the previous night, as he was excited about conversing with Sanjana for the very first time. He had bought an expensive perfume in order to smell good while sitting next to her. He rehearsed again and again about how to introduce himself to her in Bengali with the little Bengali he knew.

He put on the finest shirt he owned. After completing his M.A class in the morning, he went to the Aptech academy in the afternoon with myriads of expectations. His heart had never felt such an overflowing joy, ever..

However, Sanjana did not come to the academy that day. Even though it disappointed Vijay, he consoled himself that he would meet her the day after tomorrow.

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“Sanjana, didn't you go to computer class today?” asked Bobby, Sanjana's roommate, who returned from college.

“Nope…” responded Sanjana.

“Why?? What's wrong?”

“He had come there, too…”

“Who?”

“Him.. Vijay..”

“So what?”

“I am going to discontinue the course…”

Bobby was appalled.. “Are you foolish? Do you even know the value of Aptech certification? You have already completed a year and a half.. Just three more months to go.. Complete the course and grab your certificate first.. You are sitting here, anxious about some shameless dog who stalks you.. If he nags you, whack him with your slipper!! Why would you discontinue the course because of him? It's not fair, Sanjana!!”

Bobby had never spoken to her with this much anger before.

“You don't know anything, Bobby.. Leave me alone, please..”

“Well.. Kuch Kuch Hota Hai is out in Cinepriya theatre.. All our friends are up for the evening show... Are you coming with us?” asked Bobby..

“No, Bobby.. Kailash will call me at 9 pm tonight.. I should be here..”

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Exactly around 9:30 pm, Annadurai called out near the hostel…

“Sanjana Akkaa!!”

Sanjana hurried down the stairs and walked along with Annadurai quickly to the telephone booth.

Kailash was waiting eagerly on the other end to listen to the voice his beloved. As Sanjana took the handset of the phone and answered, “Hello..”

“My dearie.. Sanju.. Have you supped, Sweetie?”

Kailash spoke more affectionately than ever before. Kailash learned that Sanjana was so bewildered from her tone itself. Thinking of calming her, he spoke..

"Do you know, Sanju.. Girls here in Melbourne are as tempting as a sweetmeat.. Darjeeling cannot even compete..."

The response from Sanjana was as furious as fire, "I am also from Darjeeling, ain't I? Do you say that I am unattractive, too? Then find some tasty sweetmeat and marry her.. Let go of me, Kailash!!"

“No, Sanju.. I didn't mean it…”

“Whatever, Kailash.. Enough is enough.. I wanted to tell you something.. You deserve a girl better than me… Leave me alone.. Let's break up from now..”

Sanjana placed the receiver on the phone and strode out from the telephone booth..

She walked some distance towards the hostel.. Annadurai came running, “Akka.. He's calling you again..”

Sanjana approached the booth indifferently, another girl was engaged in a cheerful chat with someone, laughing happily. Sanjana waited outside the telephone booth. After that girl left, she went inside the booth and called Kailash..

“Hmm… Go ahead, Kailash..”

“Sanju sweetie.. Why did you speak so? I felt that you were depressed.. I wanted to calm you.. That's why I said so..”

“Do you think that calling Darjeeling girls ugly would pacify me?”

“No, dearie.. I didn't talk about you… You are my life, my core.. To my eyes, you are the most beautiful person in the whole world.. I was talking about other girls.. I didn't realize that you would interpret that way.. Pardon me, Sanju..”

Sanjana stood silently without responding anything… Tears flooded from her eyes…

“I cannot think of anyone in your place, Sanju.. And I cannot live without you.. I cannot even imagine my life without you.. Never ever mention the word break up again, Sanjana.. Rather, ask me to kill myself, I will..”

Sanjana was weeping without uttering a word.. Kailash knew from the other end that she was sobbing..

“Do not confuse yourself, Sanju.. I shall come in your dream tonight as usual.. And I shall take you to the best place that we had never been to… OK?”

Perhaps Sanjana would have thought that her heart might explode if she kept listening to what he spoke, she put the receiver and 500 bucks on the table, she did not wait for Annadurai to give her the balance, and she ran towards the hostel swiftly.. Annadurai was appalled to see her in such a fretful state and was eyeing her with shock as she ran…

Kailash called again.. Annadurai took the receiver and spoke.. “Sister left, sir..” said he and hung up..

Sanjana ran into her chamber, took a fruit knife which was on the table and snithed her left hand with it.. Blood oozed from the cut and splashed all over

the chamber.. She was losing her consciousness.. Her eyes were shutting.. She collapsed on the floor, in between the two cots in the chamber..Blood filled the room..

Bobby came to the hostel from the theatre.. As she opened the door of the chamber,

“Sanjanaaaaa!!!”

She screamed… Her voice resonated all over the campus..

Chapter 17 - My Heart Belongs Solely To One Man…

"She is as constant as the northern star, her love unwavering and true." - William Shakespeare

“Ennai thaalaatta varuvaalo..
Nenjil poomanjam tharuvaalo..
Thanga thaeraattam varuvaalo..
Illai yaemaatram tharuvaalo…”

Vijay was listening to the song for the 25th time in his Walkman in repeat mode.. He stayed that night at the seminary hostel in his friend's room.. He did not hear the siren noise of the ambulance as his ears were plugged in earphones.. Vijay willed to sleep inside the campus wherein Sanjana resided.. Therefore, he occasionally stayed in his friend's chamber.

Sanjana was taken in ambulance and was admitted in the hospital. Bobby accompanied her. Arjunan's family knew about it and came to the hospital immediately. Tagore and Maheshwari flew that night from Darjeeling and arrived at Madurai in the morning.

Vijay was so determined that he must not disturb Sanjana in any way. Nonetheless, had he known that she attempted to commit suicide and was taken in ambulance to the hospital, he would have run behind the ambulance bawling. He would have been the first one to visit her in the hospital. He would have wailed, howled and made a fuss in the hospital. Were there some fatal circumstance threatening her life, Vijay would have killed himself first before seeing her pass. However, Maestro Ilayaraja captivated him with his music, avoiding any such mishaps. Vijay was so engrossed in the music, pondering about Sanjana.

As Bobby had seen Sanjana at the right time, she was saved. Sanjana's parents thanked Bobby for the substantial help. Tagore was worried as they had given Arjunan's family a tough time. Arjunan comforted Tagore that the youngsters of this era make such silly mistakes.. They discharged Sanjana the very evening and brought her to Darjeeling along with them. Arjunan told the Tagore couple that let Sanjana stay in Darjeeling for a month until she heals both physically as well as mentally.

Kailash who was horrified to know that Sanjana had attempted suicide, flew to Darjeeling at once. On the other hand, Niranjana also flew to Darjeeling from the UK. As Christmas was around the corner, it was a prolonged vacation in Australia and Europe. Even though grandmother was very delighted that Niranjana, Sanjana and Kailash were going to stay with her for a month, she could not process the fact that Sanjana attempted suicide.

As Tagore enforced the family members not to ask Sanjana anything about the incident, nobody inquired why she attempted suicide. She neither spilled the beans as well. They presumed that she could have tried to commit suicide because she had already been dealing with mental struggles since childhood.

As she was surrounded by her close ones, grandmother, parents, Niranjana and Kailash, Sanjana felt so happy the whole month. Kailash showered his love for her until she sated. Kailash and Sanjana journeyed to all their favourite spots which nostalgically reminded them of their early days of love. They went to the restaurants that they used to visit frequently. They went to their school and met their teachers, staff and friends.

They entreated their school Principal and beseeched a special permission from her to travel in the school bus. They wore their school uniform and took the school bus from their home to school, they sat on their usual spots and journeyed happily. Sanjana had made a much better mental recovery. Nonetheless, her heart occasionally voyaged to Madurai, leaving Darjeeling behind. ‘Vijay must have been disappointed without seeing me in Aptech. In

case, if he knew that I tried to commit suicide, what would he have done? How much would he have suffered?' Many such thoughts surged in her heart.

Thank goodness, Vijay never knew about the matter that Sanjana attempted suicide. Only some staff and students in the hostel knew about it. However, Arjunan saw to it that the news did not spread in the college. Even Vanitha thought that Sanjana took leave and went to her native.

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Vijay was in an excruciating pang as he had not seen Sanjana in Aptech as well as in the Seminary premises. When he probed Sanjana's batch-mates in Aptech about her, they divulged to him that she had discontinued the course, when he inquired why she discontinued, nobody knew the reason. He shattered at once when he knew that she dropped out of the course. His conscience began to torment him that he had messed up her studies.

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1999, January…

Kailash had returned to Melbourne and Niranjana to London. Sanjana had recovered, her mental health was much improved while she returned to Madurai.

It was a Saturday evening.. Bobby had bought snacks for her from Jeyaram Bakery. After completing their dinner, they dug in the snacks along with hot coffee from their flask and chatted the whole night. They enjoyed spending their Saturday nights that way, laughing and chatting the whole night, sipping coffee and chowing down snacks and they would get up late the next morning.

Bobby, “I have observed you from the beginning, Sanjana. Many guys proposed theirs feelings to you, you would handle them effortlessly… But, why are you so sensitive in case of Vijay?”

Sanjana remained quiet for a while, then she responded, “I cannot deal with him like I did with other boys, Bobby..”

Bobby, “That's what I am asking you.. Do you love him as well?”

Sanjana, “Nope.. I love Kailash.. A woman can only devote her love to one man..”

“Then meet Vijay and convey to him that you do not have feelings for him.. His love for you will develop over time, won't it? Think of it, Sanjana…”

“I am not bold enough to face him, Bobby..”

Bobby wearied, “What are you saying, Sanjana.. I don't get a word of it..”

Sanjana opened up her heart for the first time about Vijay. She told Bobby about how she met him in her dream for the first time, when she was six years old, till the day she met him in the Meenakshi Amman temple. Bobby sat like a statue, listening to her. She was astonished how such an event could happen in reality.

“I cannot wrap my head around it, yet, I trust you, Sanjana.. I have read about such events in books, and watched such stories on television.. Can it happen in reality?”

Sanjana spoke in a quavering tone, “But, it's happening in my life.. What should I do?” she uttered and started sobbing.

“Do not mistake me, Sanjana. You have to be careful while deciding.. I think it is good for you to marry Vijay.. There is some supernatural bond between you two.. Or else why should you come all the way from Darjeeling to study in Madurai? Is it not to see him in person?”

“Do you ask me to abandon Kailash then?” Sanjana asked, sobbing..

“I am not phrasing it like that, Sanjana.. Even if you do not marry Kailash, numerous girls will be drawn to him.. But the events that happened in your life are as rare as a diamond in the rough.. There is some reason behind it, Sanjana.. That's why I am insisting you.. Think well before you decide anything…”

“No, Bobby.. Kailash will certainly find his end, if I abandon him.. I know it well.. If I desert Kailash and choose Vijay, I would be the worst traitor in the whole world…”

“Then.. What about Vijay?”

“I neither indicated my approval to him, nor gave him any promise.. In fact, I never ever spoke to him in person.. How will I be responsible if it affects him?”

Bobby probed quite angrily, “You are thinking in a selfish way, Sanjana.. Do you know something.. Two girls from our hostel conveyed their feelings for him.. Both are beautiful, wealthy girls.. But, he rejected them both.. He loves you to the core, Sanjana.. Only you.. You are saying that Kailash will die if you are not his.. Do you think that Vijay will be happy if you are not with him?”

Sanjana raised her voice, too, “What do you ask me to do, Bobby? Do you ask me to betray Kailash who thinks of me to be his universe.. Or to fool his parents who accepted me as their daughter-in-law despite my mental health

conditions? Had they not helped my parents, our family would have become penniless.. Or do you ask me to tell my parents that I do not love Kailash now and that I love a new guy.. What would they think of me?"

Bobby contemplated it from Sanjana's perspective.. She became silent.. It was around 3:00 am.. Someone knocked on their room door..

Bobby opened the door.. Warden Nesamani was standing there..

"Why didn't you turn off the light, yet?"

Bobby responded, "We are studying, sister.."

Warden Nesamani did not acknowledge what Bobby said, she looked at Sanjana whose eyes were bloodshot and puffy from weeping, "Sanjana.. What have you done? Had something happened to you, how would I answer your parents and guardian? Are you that brave to commit suicide? I am giving a week's time, find some other hostel to stay.."

As the warden said so and left the chamber, Bobby patted Sanjana's shoulder and uttered, "Don't worry, Sanjana.. We shall both move out from here and find some other women's hostel.." Sanjana replied, "No, Bobby.. I will stay in Arjunan uncle's home for a while.. Just two more months to go.. Study holidays will begin in the first week of March.. I will go to my native then.." Sanjana replied distraught.

At that time, Vijay prayed to God in the chapel which was inside the campus of the seminary, he knelt before God the whole night, beseeching that Sanjana should become his life-partner..

Chapter 18 - Yes, I am Indeed Searching .. For I have Lost..

"The soul's yearning for union with the beloved is its deepest, most primordial desire." - Plato

“Have you lost something?”

Vijay looked up suddenly as he heard a girl's voice. Viji, who was coming along with her friends, with a smiling face, probed him.

“Nope.. Why?” Vijay asked..

“You always hang your head down, while you walk, without looking up.. That's why I thought that you are searching for something that you have lost…”

Vijay flashed a shy smile and walked past them… Viji and her friends who came along with her walked laughing aloud..

Viji alias Vijayalakshmi had joined first year in M.Sc Communication that year. She was a dynamic, jovial girl. She was also staying in the same hostel where Sanjana was staying, but on the ground floor. She wished to speak with Vijay and wanted to know about him, as he was the most unique in the premise.

Viji's native is Nagapattinam. A slender, bespectacled girl. She always wears salwar. As she was a lively, good-humoured girl, a troop of lasses always surrounded her.

As Vijay studied in all-boys school from the beginning, he always felt bashful to talk to girls. Nonetheless, as Viji broke the ice, and spoke causally, Vijay fostered a friendship with her.

They both became good friends sooner. Vijay thought of telling Viji about his unrequited love for Sanjana, so that Viji can talk to her once again about Vijay. However, he did not want to disturb Sanjana again. But, the way she dropped out of Aptech course after seeing Vijay and staying at her uncle's house recently, commuting as a day scholar, pierced his heart and gnawed at his conscience..

As Father Isaac's health condition worsened from the last month, Vijay stayed by his side and looked after him. Therefore, he did not visit Madurai often. During that time, Sanjana also had gone to Darjeeling for her study holidays. Father Isaac told Vijay that he was doing better and enforced him not to miss his computer classes. Hence, Vijay requested the congregants of the chapel, "Please take care of Father…" and started going to the college again. It was at that time, he had acquired the friendship of Viji.

Vijay had told Father Isaac about his new friend Viji. Father told him, "Bring her to our home one day.." Viji also wanted to see Father Isaac and wished to visit the village wherein Vijay lived.

After some days, on a Saturday, Vijay took Viji to his village. As soon as she saw Father, she touched his feet to show her reverence. He drew a Cross on Viji's forehead and blessed her, "May God bless you, my child!" Even though Father was sick, he had prepared delectable semolina pudding (Kesari), tempered with ghee and served them both.

"You know, Viji.. Father is an expert in semolina pudding.. He prepares it whenever guests visit us.." uttered Vijay.

Father, "Vijay.. Roosevelt has come to Madurai from London. He came to visit me yesterday. He had brought an apparel for you and a sphygmomanometer for me it seems. But he forgot to bring them yesterday.. He told you to go to

Koodal Nagar today. He is returning to London this afternoon. He wanted to see you and give the gifts to you before he leaves. Will you go there now?"

Vijay looked at Viji..

"You go, Vijay.. I shall be here and keep Father company…"

As soon as Vijay left,

"I sent him away for a reason, my child.. I need to share something important with you regarding him.." voiced Father.

Chapter 19 - A Friend To Errand

"It's painful to love someone who doesn't love you back. But what is more painful is to love someone and never find the courage to let that person know how you feel." - Unknown

The next day.. (1999, April)

Vijay and Viji were sitting at Sangeeta Restaurant which was located opposite to the Periyar Bus Stand in Madurai. The hotel's signature dish, Bonda along with coconut chutney were placed in front of them. Vijay began to chow down a bonda.

“Why did you not tell me anything, Vijay? You could have told me that you love Sanjana…”

Vijay startled..

“Did Father tell you anything yesterday?”

Viji, “Of course.. He told me everything..”

Vijay perspired, “Everything?”

“Yes.. Does Sanjana know about this?” probed Viji..

“She does not know anything.. She only knows that I love her..”

Viji pondered deeply and sighed…

“Fine.. I shall do something.. Her semester exams are going on now.. But she is not residing in the hostel these days.. She is staying in her relative's house and commutes to college it seems..”

Vijay responded ruefully, “Yes, Viji.. She discontinued her studies in the Aptech academy as soon as she saw me there.. Now, she has moved out of the hostel, too.. She avoids me completely.. She is scared of me.. Am I a ghost or demon? I feel so distraught…”

Viji replied, “To study for her exams, she comes to the hostel to learn with her friends, Vijay.. I saw her last night in the hostel..”

Vijay asked joyfully, “Is it?”

Viji responded, “Yes, Vijay.. I will go, talk to her tomorrow around 6 in the evening.. I will bring her to the cafeteria.. You should be at cafeteria by 5 pm sharp.. If you both open up, you can resolve it, Vijay.. Tell her what happened from the very beginning, tell her everything.. Do not hide anything.. Afterward, everything rests in God's hands..”

Vijay felt as though a thousand flowers bloomed inside his heart.. A new faith flourished in him.. He had waited for two years for this special moment…

Chapter 20 - A Word That Incinerated His Life…

"There is no torment greater than unrequited love." - George R.R. Martin

The next evening, 4:30 pm..

"I am not interested…"

As a broken gramophone record, Sanjana kept repeating the same sentence again and again, while Viji talked to her… Her tone was rigid and the way she spoke was harsh..

When Viji asked Sanjana, "Sanjana, may I have a word with you??" standing outside the chamber she welcomed Viji with a smiling face. But the moment, Sanjana knew that Viji had come to talk about Vijay, the smile on her lips faded and her face turned red in fury.. Viji, who did not anticipate such a sudden change from her, got afraid seeing it.

"He already knows that I love Kailash, my friend Vanitha told him about my relationship last year itself.. Sending people to errand again and again is not fair.." Sanjana vented furiously.

Viji replied calmly, "I understand, Sanjana.. But listen to me for a moment, please.. Vijay is not like other guys.. Many boys must have proposed their love to you like Vijay.. However, there is a huge difference between the others and Vijay.. If you know the reason…"

Sanjana stopped her in the midway while speaking, "Whatever.. I am already committed. There is no use talking to me.. Do you know, Viji.. I am returning to Darjeeling tonight.. From this night, the three-year ally between me and Madurai will be over.. I will never return to Madurai again.."

Viji appalled.. “OK, Sanjana.. Let it be as you say.. But, there is one humble request.. Vijay is waiting for you in the cafeteria.. Please come there and grant him just ten minutes to talk.. It will atleast comfort him, as he has considered you his universe for the past two years…

Sanjana raised her voice, “No, Viji.. I do not want to talk about this again.. I respect you.. Let go of me, I do not feel like talking to anyone.. I do not have time for any such thing.. I have to catch the flight and I have to get ready now..”

Bobby silently listened to the conversation between them both.. She was at a loss for words.. She signalled Viji through her glance, “Leave her be, there is no use talking to her..” Viji left the room with complete disappointment.

Vijay must be waiting in the cafeteria, expecting that I will bring Sanjana along with me. What will I tell him? Why is she disregarding a beautiful life that awaits her? Shucks! I have never seen such a stone-hearted woman before! What will I tell Father? He will shatter if I tell what happened now!! Viji walked towards the cafeteria with so much sorrow..

She entered the cafeteria..

Vijay was not there… She asked a person who worked there, “Brother, did Vijay come?”

“Vijay did not come here..”

Viji was confused, “What? Why did he not come?”

She walked straight to the telephone booth and phoned Father.. She called thrice, the phone rang fully each time.. But no one answered the call..

Chapter 20 - "Eli, Eli, Lama Sabachthani?"

"I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of His wrath. He hath led me, and brought me into darkness, but not into light." - Lamentations 3:1,2 (The Holy Bible)

The very morning 9:30 am..

Viji asked him to come to the cafeteria at 5 pm only. However, Vijay got ready in the early morning itself, at 6 am. He ironed the finest shirt and jeans he owned, the previous night itself. He wore the same apparel the day he was about to meet her in Aptech. Nonetheless, he was left feeling disappointed.

Father made him stay at home until 9:30 am, enforcing him to go after finishing his breakfast. Father had prepared sweet pongal for Vijay. As soon as swallowing it, he scudded to the bus stop.

The bus which was supposed to arrive at 9:00 am did not come until 9:30 am. As Vijay did not like to wear wrist watches, he repeatedly asked people nearby for the time.

Morning 9:45 am..

Vijay could see the Madurai bus arriving from a distance.. The buses which were supposed to come at 9:00 am and 9:45 am were racing to reach the stop… "Darn! The buses never come on time... Now both of them are arriving at once…" Vijay berated in his heart and stretched his hand to stop the bus.

A boy who resided near the chapel came racing on his bicycle as fast as lightning and stopped before Vijay.. He panted heavily, unable to utter a word..

“Vijay annaa!! Mom said to bring you with me immediately.. Father is unconscious..”

Vijay felt as if his life had been drained from him.. Vijay peddled the bicycle, allowing the boy to sit behind him… The two buses that arrived simultaneously left for Periyar Bus stand, crossing paths as they departed.

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Sister Sahaya Mary who lived next door, thumped her chest and wailed aloud. Vijay lifted Father Isaac who was laid down and placed him on his lap. Many people had gathered there by then. The secretary of the chapel, brother Jayapaul, had brought a car to take Father to the hospital, and ran inside the house..

“He was alright when I was leaving..” Vijay asked that sister while rubbing Father's chest gently… He felt a lump in his throat as he was engulfed by immense sorrow…

“I was sweeping the doorway, Vijay.. As I heard a thud inside the house, I came to see what had happened.. The Father who was praying, had fallen unconscious, lying face down...

By then, brother Jayapaul came running into the house and checked Father's pulse, he yelled aloud, “Vijayyy!!” and hugged him.. Vijay felt as if his very existence had been ripped from him..

“Anna.. Please lift my Father, we shall take him to the hospital.. We can revive him… He is my only family..” Vijay screamed in anguish.

A nearby doctor was brought on a bike.. He checked Father and confirmed his death..

Vijay wailed, “Daddy.. Daddy.. Daddy..” his mournful cry shook the whole village.. Though Father Isaac Mariyan was not his biological father, he always liked to call him daddy, instead of Father. Because he had no immediate family, such as parents, siblings or relatives.. As a priest who had taken a vow of celibacy, people may doubt his piety and saintliness if Vijay called him daddy. So he always called him Father. But, on that day he was uncontrollable..

The bishop, archbishops, other parish priests, congregants and other commoners began gathering. The whole of Ilandhaipatti drowned in sorrow. The management of the congregation decided to bury him that evening itself. As Vijay was Father's adopted son, they asked his consent.

He felt like the whole world had turned dark. The only family that he had, had been taken away from him.. “Do I even have a future now?” the question had been tormenting him.

The deceased Father was taken away for burial in a hearse wagon which was decorated with flowers. Vijay was sitting like a spiritless man beside him, utterly desolate after his prolonged wailing. He was drained of all strength, unable to shed another tear. The hearse van, surrounded by many other vehicles, entered Madurai at around 4:30 pm.

Viji was in conversation with Sanjana at that moment. She was encumbered with a question, ‘Why hadn't Vijay come to the cafeteria yet?’ Bewildered, she went to her chamber in the hostel, packed up her things and prepared to go to her native. Her semester exams were over already. As her family members were out of town, she had to stay in the hostel until they returned home.

Her mother called her the previous night and informed her that they had returned home. So Viji decided to go home. She hired an auto rickshaw from Alagaradi to go to Periyar Bus stand. On her way, she noticed an obituary put up on the wall of a church, announcing the passing of Father Isaac Mariyan.

Shock gripped her heart, leaving it frozen. She apprehended why Vijay had not come to the cafeteria that day.

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Evening 7:30 pm…

The way to Periyar Bus stand was jam-packed that day. Vehicles were moving inch by inch. After the burial of Father Isaac, Vijay was returning home in brother Jayapaul's car. At the same time, Sanjana was on her way to the airport in Arjunan's car. Satish was driving the car. Sanjana was sitting on the front passenger seat.

Both vehicles passed each other closely in the teeming traffic. Vijay and Sanjana saw each other inadvertently. Both the vehicles crossed within two seconds. Sanjana perceived a shattered, wrecked, and devastated Vijay.

Vijay wanted to shout and call out aloud “Sanjanaaa..” Yet, he lacked strength, both emotionally and physically.. His throeing heart kept reciting a Bible Verse again and again…

“Eli, Eli, lama Sabachthani?”
Which means, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

Chapter 22 - He Tore My Heart Apart Like A Thorn..

"The past beats inside me like a second heart." - John Banville

October 2023,
Marylebone, London..

Immobile and stunned, Diya resembled a statue in her state of shock.. Tears flooded from her eyes..

Sanjana paused frequently, tears streaming down her face, as she recounted her story… She had now become too weak to shed tears..

Diya probed, "Mom, during those two years you were in Madurai, did you two never speak to each other?"

Sanjana shook her head in response, indicating no.

"On the bonnet of the car Vijay traveled in, as well as the other two cars accompanying it, were posters of a Christian Priest, adorned with flowers. Those cars appeared to be participating in some funeral service. I was certain that the deceased must have been his foster parent. Because Vijay was very much devastated when I saw him that day…"

Diya sat still, eying her mother pathetically..

"When I perceived him for the very first time in the temple, he looked so handsome and happy, beaming with joy. I have always seen looking tidy, well-dressed and presentable. But, when I last saw him in a state of despair and devastation, it affected me deeply, leaving me feeling shattered as well."

Diya, "What happened then?"

“That was my last day in Madurai. I returned to Darjeeling then. I did not hear anything about him thereafter. I deliberately severed contact with all my friends in Madurai, to ensure he would not find out anything about me..

“Upon learning of my return to Darjeeling, Kailash resigned from his job in Australia and came back to Darjeeling. He was not satisfied with the job there. He stayed in Darjeeling for a month. Later, he secured a job in Mumbai and went there. Our parents decided to have our wedding in January of the millennium.

“However, my grandmother's health condition worsened and as the company Kailash worked for intended to send him to London in November, our marriage was preponed to September 22..

“Everything was going well until a couple of months before my wedding. Challenges teamed up afterwards. In the month of July, I faced numerous mental struggles. However, I did not faint or black out. Rather, I was always drowned in some sort of confusion, fear and depression..

“On top of all, my heart was engulfed with sorrow over Vijay. My mind was consumed with sadness, wondering what had happened to him, how he was doing now, and how he would live his life without me. I was in a state where I could not confide in anyone, not even Kailash. All these things pushed me to the brink of mental illness. I resorted to taking sleeping pills and slept continuously.

“I do not know what Father Lawrence was thinking during that time. He met my parents and uttered, “Don't rush into arranging Sanjana's wedding. Postpone it for at least a year..” My parents were shocked to hear it and asked him, “Why do you suggest that? Is there something wrong?” But Father replied, “I just feel it inside..” and left. My parents were confused, they thought I would have told him something.

“I asked Father Lawrence, “ Why did you tell my parents to put off the wedding, uncle?” He responded, “You are like my daughter, Sanju.. I have been praying to God for you, since your childhood… I apprehended that you are amid a chaotic situation and you needed some time to decide your own future, that's why I told them so..” ”

“Did you tell Father Lawrence atleast then, about the incidents that had happened in Madurai?” Diya probed.

“No, Diya.. Had I told Father, he would have convinced my parents, Kailash’s parents and him and would have stopped the wedding.. He would have tried to unite me with Vijay.. I did not want such things to happen..”

Diya looked keenly into Sanjana's eyes, flashed a regretful smile and sighed..

Sanjana continued.. “I faced numerous problems thereafter.. As the wedding was rescheduled to an earlier date, we were unable to secure a wedding date in the Tirupati temple.. We were supposed to have a mass wedding ceremony along with many other couples.. Kailash did not like it.. Hence, we planned our wedding in a nearby Marriage Hall and to visit the temple to seek blessings and envision the deity… But the owner of the Marriage Hall returned the advance amount we paid , three weeks before our wedding and told us to find another hall as they were going to do some renovation work because of some damage in the building…”

Diya exclaimed, “Alas!!”

“Then they secured a very ordinary, small Marriage Hall. One problem was resolved somehow. A fortnight before my marriage, I was like a lunatic.. I was struggling with so much bewilderment.. I felt pangs of guilt, I blamed myself for sabotaging Vijay's life..

Diya, “But, you never indicated any signs of accepting Vijay's love, did you, mommy?”

“That's true.. However, had I not been to Madurai, had he not seen me, he could have seen someone else and could have married her..”

Diya, “What is your mistake in this, mommy? You did not go to Madurai intentionally to see Vijay.. You went to study in Madurai, and he was there… It is the play of destiny..”

Sanjana, “No, Diya.. There lies the blunder of mine.. Do you know what my invocation to God for many years was? I sincerely prayed to God to show me the man that I see in my dreams in person.. As a response to my petition, God showed him to me in person.. However, I had given my heart to someone already.. Even though I instigated this meeting, I safeguarded my life somehow.. Nonetheless, the one who was completely affected by this was Vijay!!”

Diya, “Just like how you knew him before you actually met him in person, he also knew you somehow, didn't he?”

“Of course, Diya… That girl, Viji tried to tell this to me that day.. ‘Many guys must have proposed their love for you, just like Vijay did.. But there's a huge difference between them and the way Vijay loves you.. Please listen to that reason and make your decision..’ she said..”

Diya, “Hmmm..”

Sanjana sighed heavily, “But, until today I do not know what the reason is…”

Diya, “Well.. Then how did your marriage happen?”

Sanjana, “My wedding day was around the corner.. On the other hand, my mental strifes worsened even more.. Exactly four days before my wedding, a very unfortunate event which all of us were afraid of, happened..”

Chapter 23 - God, Show Some Mercy!!

"Fate is like a strange, unpopular restaurant filled with odd little waiters who bring you things you never asked for and don't always like." — Lemony Snicket

1999, September 18, Saturday..

Four days before marriage..

The entire street where Kailash and Sanjana lived was adorned so magnificently to commemorate their wedding festivities. The street was ornated with vibrant festoons and fairly lights. Banners featuring Kailash and Sanjana decked the surroundings. Kailash organised photoshoot for this occasion.

Kailash and his family members have already departed for Tirupati. Suresh and Niranjana had scheduled to arrive in Tirupati one day prior to the wedding. Since the reception was scheduled two days after the wedding, Tagore was occupied with arranging accommodations for the relatives. The bride Sanjana, her family, and a few other close relatives have arranged to fly to Tirupati on September 20th.

Sanjana's grandmother, eagerly anticipating Sanjana's wedding, contributed as much as she could to the wedding preparations. Despite everyone's advice to rest, she refused, saying, "I will work for my granddaughter's wedding," and continued to work joyfully.

Grandmother had saved a sum of one lakh Rupees for Sanjana's wedding. She intended to present Sanjana with a gold necklace as her wedding gift. While Tagore took his car and left, Sanjana, Maheshwari, her grandmother, and another relative woman traveled to a renowned jewellery store in

Darjeeling by taxi. Sanjana chose a necklace to her liking. They were all joyfully returning home after making the purchase.

The taxi driver was drunk. He was driving fast when he suddenly stopped the car as a bike crossed in front of him. The grandmother, who was sitting in the front passenger seat without fastening her seatbelt, was thrown onto the dashboard. Everyone inside the car screamed in alarm. As grandmother's chest hit the dashboard, she cried out in agony.

The car rushed to the nearby hospital, where the grandmother was admitted to the casualty section. Due to grandmother being over 80 years old and in poor health, doctors faced a challenge in trying to save her.

After three hours of effort, the doctors conveyed that they couldn't save her. They brought out her grandmother with her face covered. Maheshwari and Sanjana burst into loud wails of grief.

Tagore hurried to the hospital upon learning of the incident. The grandmother's body was transported to Sanjana's house in a hearse wagon. The street, which had been filled with wedding celebrations, was now enveloped in sorrow.

Kailash was devastated upon hearing about the incident. He attempted to contact Sanjana by phone, but she was inconsolable, clinging to her grandmother's body and weeping uncontrollably. She felt as though her entire world had been plunged into darkness. Despite everyone's efforts to console and lift her, she remained inconsolable. Suresh and Niranjana cancelled their plans to visit Tirupati and immediately flew to Darjeeling. Many people speculated that the wedding would be called off.

The parents of Kailash and Sanjana discussed over the phone. Tagore expressed disapproval when Rao suggested bringing Celine and Kailash to attend the grandmother's funeral. Tagore advised Rao to remain in Tirupati.

He mentioned that Sanjana and her family would leave for Tirupati the day after tomorrow, following the grandmother's funeral service the next evening. Let the wedding proceed as planned.

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Sanjana and her family arrived in Tirupati at midnight on September 20th. When Kailash and Sanjana initially planned their wedding at the Madurai Meenakshi Amman temple, Sanjana expressed to Kailash her desire to receive their first blessing from her grandmother after the wedding. The loss of her grandmother before the wedding deeply saddened her.

The grief of her grandmother's passing compounded with the depression she was already battling overwhelmed her. The flight journey left her drained, and Sanjana was exhausted. Upon reaching their accommodation, she had her supper and immediately took a pill for her severe headache and slept.

In the midnight, Sanjana developed a severe fever and was rushed to the hospital. On September 21st, just a day before her wedding, she was admitted to the hospital. Since the wedding was scheduled early in the morning, around 5:00 to 6:00 am, she had to start getting ready from the previous night. She underwent intensive treatment until the evening of the 21st. Kailash remained by Sanjana's side in the hospital, expressing his anguish, "Why do such things happen to us?" he asked, tears streaming down his face. Sanjana was discharged around 6:00 pm that day.

The beautician crew had already arrived and were waiting for the bride. Seeing Sanjana looking tired and weary, they felt sorry for her. Tagore called their family astrologer, who explained, "These obstacles arise due to Vish Yog in her natal chart. Many people have faced marriage cancellations because of this. Therefore, despite the challenges, let the wedding proceed as planned. If it goes ahead as scheduled, their future life will be auspicious."

Tagore felt reassured after understanding the reason behind these obstacles. Meanwhile, the bride was beautifully adorned and looked radiant, resembling a statue made of gold.

Chapter 24 - He Flashed Before My Eyes..

“Go find yourself first so you can also find me” -Rumi

October 2023,
Marylebone, London.

“Somehow, our wedding ceremony came to an end. The reception, which took place on the third day, was magnificent. Kailash and I were genuinely happy on that particular day. We traveled to Dubai for our honeymoon. Kailash left to London afterwards.

"I was planning to go to London after completing my M.Sc. I lived in a hostel in Delhi, and pursued my M.Sc. through distance education, while working. Kailash and I were in separate locations, which was painful for me.”

Diya, “Did you not know anything about Vijay then?”

Sanjana, "I visited my hometown in 2002 for my birthday. Kailash was in London at that time. While I was at my in-laws' house, a phone call came in. My mother-in-law answered it and then called me. Taking the handset from her, I placed it to my ear and greeted with a 'hello'. On the other end was Vijay..”

Diya expressed her surprise, asking, "What? Did he call you?”

Sanjana, “He spoke fluently in Bengali and wished me a happy birthday. I asked him if he knew that I had gotten married. He laughed and said he had heard about it. Then, he asked for my email ID, and I gave it to him.”

Diya, “What happened then?”

“We exchanged a few friendly emails afterward. He sketched a portrait of me in pencil and sent it over. That's when I discovered his talent as an artist. Each day, he observed me for only a few seconds. I was amazed at how accurately he could draw me…”

Diya, “You were the entirety of his heart..”

Sanjana sighed heavily..

“The company I was employed with in Delhi assigned me to a project in Chennai. Feeling the desire to see Vijay, I invited him to visit Chennai..”

Diya was astonished to hear it.. “Wow.. Did you two meet in person? Really?”

“I was consumed by curiosity about why he loved me.. The thought of not knowing the reason felt unbearable, like my head would explode.. I contemplated maintaining our friendship since I was already married, but that decision turned out to be a mistake…”

Diya, “Why, mummy? What happened then?”

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2003, April..
Chennai.

Evening 7:00 pm..

Vijay waited for Sanjana at the entrance of Solaris Corporation on Mount Road in Chennai. Sanjana was dressed in a green salwar with a mustard yellow dupatta, while Vijay wore a green checked shirt with a Chinese collar, paired with black jeans. Sanjana greeted him with a beautiful smile on her lips as she shook his hand, saying, "Hi, Vijay!”

They decided to visit a coffee shop in the nearby Spencer Plaza and began walking towards it. Vijay couldn't shake the feeling of disbelief, unsure if it was reality or just a dream. It had been four years since Vijay had last seen Sanjana, and finally, he had the opportunity to talk to her in person.

They both entered the Landmark coffee shop on the ground floor and took their seats. Without hesitation, Vijay asked Sanjana an unexpected question.

“Sanjana, are you truly married, or have you been lying to avoid me?”

Sanjana was appalled upon hearing it. “What an absurd question! Is he probing me because I do not wear wedding chain as Tamilians do?”

Sanjana attempted to convince Vijay through various means that she was married, but Vijay remained unconvinced. Eventually, Vijay feigned belief in what Sanjana was asserting. Sanjana discerned that he was merely pretending to trust her words. She was puzzled by his disbelief in her marital status.

“Why is he a mystery to me?”

After a while, he confessed his deep love for her over the past years. He revealed how he had learned Bengali for her, enrolled in Aptech because of her, meticulously noted down in his diary the dresses she wore, and affectionately called her by pet names. Like a floodgate opening, he poured out everything to her. She listened intently, her gaze unwavering, she remained silent, urging him to continue revealing his feelings.

Truly, he was more childlike at heart than she had realised.… “Darn! How have I snipped this child's heart so ruthlessly!” Her heart began to melt away.. In an attempt to persuade him, she spoke words devoid of conviction, saying, "Don't worry, Vijay… You deserve someone better than me.." She lacked the courage to meet his gaze as she uttered these words, knowing

deep down that she didn't believe what she was saying. She was well aware that no one else could fill the void she left but her.

At last, she frained the question that she longed to ask him, “Your friend Viji told me that there is an important reason behind your love for me.. What is it?”

Vijay gazed into her eyes and replied, “You're already married, aren't you? Nothing will change by discussing this. You belong to someone else now. It wouldn't be fair to discuss it further.”

Sanjana felt disappointed, and she was taken aback by what Vijay said next.

“Sanjana, do you know something? You are going to become a spiritualist in the future..”

Only my parents and my grandmother know this information, shared through the astrologer. How did he come to know about it?

He is aware of my past, which might be the basis for his feelings towards me. He also seems to know about my future. However, he is unaware of my present circumstances, particularly my marital status. His disbelief in my marriage suggests a strong conviction in something. What is it? Who is this man?

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The twenty-minute encounter in Chennai marks both the first and last meeting between Vijay and Sanjana.

Sanjana, who had hoped to find answers to her questions about Vijay, left Chennai without resolving the old inquiries and with new ones swirling in her mind…

“Detaching you from me,
This birth may terminate,
I shall wait to reincarnate,
To own you as mine..”

Sanjana was dismayed to receive the SMS from Vijay the following morning. She chose not to reply.

“Despite us going different paths,
Despite the mislodged distance between us,
One day our trails will be one,
As predestined our love will win..”

Sanjana was consumed by fear and fury. He is not a lunatic, because he knows my past as well as my future.. But, why does he refuse to accept that I am married? What does he believe strongly? No.. No.. Let's end this relationship here…

The next day, she received a call from Vijay on her cell phone. As soon as she answered, she spoke with fiery intensity. "Why do you send me such messages? Why can't you accept that I'm already married? How dare you?" She continued to berate him for five minutes straight. Vijay remained silent on the other end, attempting to say something. However, she didn't allow him to speak, abruptly ending the call and blocking his number.

Chapter 25 - The Miserable Martyr: Enduring Injustice

"In the symphony of existence, there are those who bear the discordant notes, their hearts echoing with the pain of a thousand sorrows." - Unknown

"I have not made contact with him since then. Twenty years have passed, and I am unaware of his current whereabouts or activities. I moved to London in 2004, and you were born in November 2005.. Life has continued on its course since then…"

Diya, "If he had married, he would likely have a son or daughter around my age.."

Sanjana, "He should have married, had children, and enjoyed a happy family life.. I pray for his joy and contentment every day, Diya.."

"Do you think he will find happiness without you in his life, mommy?"

Sanjana remained silent, hanging her head without uttering a word. A sigh was the only response from her.

Diya, "Well.. Did he appear in your dreams afterwards?"

Sanjana, "No, dear.. The frequency of my dreams decreased significantly when I was in Madurai itself.. Even during mental struggles, I never fainted afterwards, so I did not dream much.. However, five years ago, on the night of Diwali, I had an unforgettable dream… Which was very dreadful.."

I was very busy on the day of Diwali.. And I was sound asleep that night..

Even recalling the dream now sends shivers down my spine.. It was a truly horrifying dream…

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The same abyssal darkness..

The same faint whisper of the conch horn…

A tumultuous wail and outcry as though someone were releasing the sorrow of their entire life…

This time, it was not Sanjana who was wailing, but Vijay…

There was no earth beneath him to stand on… However, Vijay knelt down in that Stygian blackness and cried.. He was completely surrounded by utter darkness.. Nothing else, but darkness.. She could see Vijay clearly.. Vijay was aware that Sanjana was watching him beyond the periphery of darkness..

As though a person who was caught in quicksand cries out for help, stretching their hand, he stretched his hand out to Sanjana to render him help.. Sanjana could only see him, she felt as if she was imprisoned and powerless... She could not even open her mouth to console him… She was bound by something, unable to help him…

He continued to wail until his heart melted and oozed out as blood.. Not only Sanjana, nobody came to rescue him from there.. Not even a disembodied voice spoke to console him..

The dream persisted for Sanjana, holding her captive within its grasp.. Meanwhile, Vijay continued to wail pathetically within the dream's enduring grip... Eventually, he became too powerless to even shed tears, yet the cries persisted, unheard.. With no one to offer aid, he vanished into the darkness, as if evaporating into thin air..

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Sanjana was unable to speak continuously…

Diya placed her hand on Sanjana's shoulder and gently patted her to offer solace…

“When I woke up the next day, an overwhelming burden started weighing me down. It has not lifted since. I wanted to unburden myself by sharing it with someone, but I did not know who to confide in. When you asked me to tell my story, I felt like sharing everything with you. Yet, I was not sure if I could reveal it all. Now that I have poured out my heart to you, let us see if that burden eases…”

“Doesn't daddy know any of this, mommy? Didn't you share anything with him?”

“Your father is not even aware that there was a person called Vijay in my life, Diya.. Until today, he believes he himself is my Fantasy Prince..”

“Why did you not confide in daddy? It is not your fault, mummy..”

“Listen, Diya. If the Kailash I loved were wicked or just an ordinary man, I would have left him the day I first saw Vijay in Madurai. But the Kailash I love was pure and innocent. He genuinely loved me and believed I was his entire world. You know how strong our bond is to this day. Even after meeting Vijay, I rejected him and continued to love Kailash. Can you comprehend how deeply we loved each other?

“If I had told Kailash about Vijay earlier, he would have likely tried to unite me with Vijay for the sake of my happiness. But then, what about his own life?”

Diya burst into tears. The reverence she had towards her loving parents had elated even more now. She felt proud of them. She thought in her heart that if she ever fell in love, she should love as deeply and devotedly as her parents did.

As Sanjana embraced her tightly, Diya kissed her mother's forehead affectionately..

“Do you know something, Diya? Were it not for you and your father, I would have returned to India a long time ago.. I would have become an ascetic and lived in some temple.. Many temples in India offer free food for people. Life would be simple, just eating that food once a day and living in the temple. No burdens, no sorrows. It's my desire, and has become my fantasy now..”

“Mommy.. Why do you say that? We will never let you go..”

By then, it had grown dark. They quickly had instant food for dinner and watched their favourite television series.

After the show ended, Diya asked...

“Mommy, what climax would you suggest for my film?”

Sanjana, “Let the climax reflect the reality of what truly happened..”

“In your tale, the injustice that befell Vijay does not sit right with me as a creator.”

“Then, let the story conclude with Vijay finding happiness in marriage with a woman who surpasses me..”

“It is just some lame excuse for the injustice that happened to him..”

Sanjana could not comprehend it, “What do you say now? I am the one who lived through it in real life. I convinced myself that he must be living happily now. What's wrong with you?”

“That is just the technique you have found to deceive yourself, Mommy. As a creator I would not see it that way.”

Sanjana lost her patience.. “You haven't even completed your first year, yet you're talking like Alfred Hitchcock's right hand. Listen up, Diya. Your father will also watch the film you make. Don't forget that. And don't make me regret sharing my story with you..”

“I will never allow you to regret it, Mommy. However, every character in my story deserves justice. If I fail to provide that, then I am not worthy of making films. Just wait and see…”

Chapter 26 - The Love of Souls is Everlasting…

"Love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep it away. If one were to give all the wealth of one's house for love, it would be utterly scorned" -Song of Solomon 8:6,7 (The Holy Bible)

January 2024,
Odeon Leicester Square, London.

On that day, the illustrious Odeon Leicester Square in London bustled with students and parents. Numerous students from diverse colleges, in addition to the London Film Institute where Diya attends, gathered at the theatre. Many film enthusiasts eagerly awaited the screening of the acclaimed short films.

With Kailash occupied in Scotland on business matters, only Sanjana accompanied Diya. 'Will Diya win this competition? How did she depict my story into a film?' such thoughts intensified Sanjana's anxiety.

One after another, the short films that claimed third and second prizes were screened. Almost two and a half hours elapsed. The excellence of both films was undeniable, affirming the skill and creativity of Ismail Qureshi's students.

Before unveiling the competition winner and screening the film, a dinner break was announced. Inside the theatre premises, the participating students and their parents appeared noticeably anxious. The teams that secured the third and second prizes celebrated their success with their parents. A mix of celebration and nervous anticipation filled the entire premises.

Sanjana harbored doubts about her daughter's chances of winning, wondering if she could truly compete against second and third-year students.

Sanjana's worry intensified when she observed Diya's anxiety. ‘Would Diya be able to accept her defeat if she did not win the first prize?’ She started comforting her, saying, "Whether you win the first prize or not, just participating in the competition is an accomplishment in itself. Accept whatever the outcome may be."

The bell rang in the theatre, summoning everyone inside.

After five minutes, Ismail Qureshi ascended the dais amidst thunderous applause. The microphone was handed to him, and he held in his other hand the announcement paper revealing the winner of the first prize.

“Love is an extraordinary force, extending far beyond the mere existence of humanity over the last 300,000 years. Its origins predate the formation of stars and constellations, even preceding the birth of the universe itself. This omnipotent power transcends temporal and spatial boundaries, existing prior to birth and enduring beyond death. Love defies comprehension, characterised by its selflessness, unconditionality, and boundlessness. For human advancement, embracing love is paramount.

“Love manifests in various dimensions, from the intimate connection between two atoms to the cohesion among elements in a compound. Yet, the most profound dimension is the love shared between immortal souls, surpassing even human affection in its purity. Today, an epic tale depicting such remarkable love stands poised to claim the top prize. This short film, inspired by a true event in India, resonates deeply with me due to its portrayal of life and the craftsmanship evident in its production. It brings me great joy to endorse this deserving short film for first prize honours in every aspect..

Congratulations to **"Eternal Echoes of Unrequited Love"** directed by Diya Rao, for claiming the first prize!”

The theatre resonated with thunderous applause as Diya stood on her seat, leaping in ecstatic joy. Sanjana, caught up in the moment, forgot herself and her surroundings, shouting in pure elation. Diya's crew members quickly rallied around, embracing one another in jubilation, reveling in their hard-earned victory. Meanwhile, Qureshi stood proudly on the dais, observing with a contented smile as his students basked in the celebration, eagerly awaiting the moment they would receive their well-deserved trophy…

As the trophy was presented and the jubilant celebrations subsided, a hush fell over the theatre. With the audience now silent and attentive, the screen illuminated, signalling the beginning of Diya's masterpiece, "Eternal Echoes of Unrequited Love."

"I seem to have loved you in numberless forms, numberless times, in life after life, in age after age forever - Rabindranath Tagore"

The movie opened with a captivating proverb. Sanjana felt deeply connected with every scene, seeing herself in each frame. Despite her triumph, Diya remained apprehensive about her mother's reaction to the film.

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Following the conclusion of the movie, when the crowd had dispersed, Qureshi gathered the crews that secured the top three positions and their parents. Diya then introduced her mother to her professor.

He said, 'I recognise you as the true heroine portrayed in the movie. You're truly remarkable, and I hold you in high esteem. Meeting you in person was something I eagerly anticipated,'" he expressed as he shook her hand. Diya gazed at her mother with pride and smiled.

Sanjana responded with a silent smile.

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As Diya and Sanjana left the theatre, it was approximately 11:30 pm, with snow drizzling outside. Sanjana drove in silence, while Diya sat in the front passenger seat.

“Why are you so quiet, Mommy? What did you think of the movie? Are you upset about the ending I chose?” Diya inquired, breaking the silence.

“No, my dear... The movie was fantastic,” Sanjana reassured. “Every character had their moment of justice, just as you intended... As a creator, you have triumphed, dearie…”

The movie left Sanjana's soul drenched in a contentment as sweet as if it were showered with gallons of honey. She felt as if her soul was enveloped in complete serenity. She yearned to shower Diya with countless kisses. She longed to bask in that sensation. That is why she remained silent while driving with Diya..

Diya raised her hands joyfully and exclaimed, “Yaayyyy! This is more than enough, Mommy… Now I truly feel like I have won the award,” Diya expressed happily..

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The next day, Sanjana sat in the living room, cutting apples to prepare juice, while Diya expressed her gratitude to everyone who appreciated her work by replying with thanks on her phone. Additionally, two prominent media outlets from England requested interviews with her.

Kailash entered the home with joyful enthusiasm. “Diya, sweetie… Congratulations! You have proven yourself to be my daughter,” he

exclaimed, embracing Diya warmly. She returned the embrace and planted a kiss on his cheek.

"Thank you, Daddy... But I am upset with you for not being there.."

“I am sorry, dearie... You know how busy I am with business... What can I do? Anyway, when will your movie be uploaded on YouTube? I shall watch it then,” Kailash inquired and then kissed Sanjana on the forehead.

“No, daddy.. Not on YouTube, but on Netflix. It is going to be released next week," Diya clarified.

Kailash exclaimed joyfully, “Wow!! On Netflix? My daughter has come so far!”

Diya's eyes welled up with joy at the sight of her father's happiness…

Kailash added proudly, "See, our love story is the best, that's why it won the first prize.”

Diya playfully teased him, saying, “Errr... Not your love story, Daddy... Mommy's love story would be too mundane for a movie... So, I had to spice things up by adding a villain character.”

Kailash was surprised to hear it. “What? A villain for me in our love story? Who is he?” he asked, intrigued…

Diya clarified, “You have no villain, you are the villain, Daddy! I introduced a hero in my story, named Vijay. The judges were impressed by that character and awarded me the first prize. But don't worry, Daddy. I have chosen a perfect ending for the story.”

Sanjana chuckled and remarked, “It might be best if you don't watch it at all, your daughter spun quite a tale..”

Kailash pretended to be angry, saying, "You little rascal! I am the one who pays your education fees, and yet you have cast me as the villain in your mother's romantic tale!”

Sanjana burst into laughter..

Diya chuckled, "You watch the movie first, Daddy, and then give me your review. You are my sweet daddy; would I really portray you as a wicked person?”

Meanwhile, Diya received a call from Qureshi and hurried out of the living room to answer it.

Before Diya returned, Sanjana and Kailash were enjoying a moment together. Sanjana affectionately fed Kailash an apple slice.

Diya returned and informed them, "Daddy... The director is arriving from India tomorrow. I have been selected to work as his assistant. Qureshi invited Mom to a meeting with the director tomorrow, which is Sunday. Would you come along too?"

Kailash expressed, "I am sorry, my dear... There is an expo at St. Albans tomorrow, and I need to be there representing our organisation... Please don't misunderstand, sweetie."

Diya facepalmed and sighed, "Daddy, you are always like this! Fine, go wherever you want.. You will come with me, won't you, Mommy?”

"I will certainly come, dearie," Sanjana assured Diya.

Chapter 27 - An Untold Story

"Coincidences are spiritual puns." — G.K. Chesterton

January 2024,
42, Milton Street, London.

On Sunday, the college and Qureshi's chamber lay quiet, with only a few staff members present. Following Qureshi's advice, Diya and Sanjana waited inside the preview theatre while Qureshi conversed with the director in his office room.

Qureshi finally arrived at the preview theatre after being half an hour late. He apologised to Diya and Sanjana for his tardiness before taking a seat in front of them.

“Mr. Qureshi, all of our crew members were incredibly eager to watch the movie crafted by that director,” Diya expressed.

Considering the circumstances, Qureshi spoke, “I will definitely organise a screening for the entire crew. However, do you know why I specifically invited just the two of you for this viewing?”

Diya and Sanjana exchanged puzzled looks, unsure of what Qureshi was alluding to…

Qureshi expressed, “Love isn't just miraculous; it works wonders. A remarkable incident has occurred among us today. I recently saw a movie by an Indian director at the Cannes Film Festival and was deeply impressed. I became determined that my dream project should be helmed by him. So, I announced a short film competition to select his crew…

“Do you know what unfolded next? The movie that left a lasting impression on me at the Cannes Film Festival appears to connect with the movie, “Eternal Echoes of Unrequited Love,” directed by Diya. It surely is the other missing half of that Indian movie.”

Diya was taken aback, and she exchanged a bewildered glance with Sanjana. Qureshi continued…

“Initially, I thought it must be coincidental. I sent Diya's film to the Indian director and asked him to watch it. After viewing the film, he called me and was certain that it was the other half of the movie he made. Moreover, he inquired if the real name of the protagonist in the actual incident was Sanjana…”

Sanjana was appalled, her heart rate increasing with shock.

Qureshi continued, “I confirmed to him that her name is indeed Sanjana. Diya had already informed me that it was a real incident from her mother's life. He expressed his desire to meet both of you and screen the movie he made. That's why I asked you two to come..”

Sanjana asked in a quivering tone, "Who is that director?"

The door of the preview theatre was knocked, and a voice asked, "May I come in?”

Qureshi called out “yes” and moved towards the door, but it swung open before he reached it, revealing Melne's arrival..

Sanjana exclaimed in surprise, "Melne!! This is unbelievable!"

"How are you, Sanjana?" he asked with a smile as he shook her hand and then Diya's.

"I just can't believe it!" Sanjana exclaimed once again, her surprise evident. Qureshi basked in her excitement and smiled..

“Neither do I,” Melne replied with a smile.

"We all tried to contact you numerous times, Sanjana, but you isolated yourself from us. Vanitha is very angry with you," Melne explained.

Sanjana replied ruefully, "I am extremely sorry, Melne. My circumstances led me to this.. I feel like talking to Vanitha right now… It’s been years…”

“I will give you her contact number; talk to her,” Melne offered before falling silent for a moment. Then he continued, “Do you know something, Sanjana? This movie that I directed and which won many awards is about... Vijay…”

Sanjana's facial expression changed. "How is Vijay doing now? Where is he?" she asked in a quivering tone…

Melne gazed deeply into her eyes for a couple of seconds. "Watch the movie first. I shall tell you about him later," he said gently..

The four of them took their seats, and the lights were dimmed..

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“God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; ***male and female*** *created he them.” (The Holy Bible - Genesis 1:27)*

The Malayalam film began with the verse from the Holy Bible, accompanied by English subtitles..

A card was shown, indicating that the scenes depicted as occurring in Tamil Nadu were dubbed into Malayalam for the viewers' understanding.

Thank you: People of Ilandhaipatti village, Tamil Nadu.

An Untold Love Story…

1983, Ilandhaipatti, Madurai district,
Tamilnadu..

The movie was played in the ancient black and white film format. In the first scene, the exterior of a chapel was shown. The chirping of frogs and crickets revealed that it was midnight as the camera zoomed towards the chapel.

In the next shot, a middle-aged man and a seven-year-old boy were shown sleeping on a mat inside the chapel. The middle-aged man was dressed in a half-sleeve vest and a lungi, while the little boy wore a shirt paired with short trousers. As the scene progressed, the chirping of insects and frogs became fainter, and the screeching noise of the ceiling fan grew louder.

Both were depicted sleeping soundly..

The boy suddenly woke up, sitting up in fright, his face was filled with fear. He turned around seeking something and woke up the person sleeping next to him. The conversation that followed was in Malayalam, with subtitles in English…

“Father!!Father!!”

He woke up from his sleep and asked, "What happened, Vijay?”

His face showed how horrified he was. "I hear someone crying, Father," he said.

"Someone's crying? No, Vijay... I don't hear anything," he reassured him.

"Don't you hear anything, Father? I hear it clearly and loudly," the boy insisted.

"You might have just had a bad dream, my little boy. Sleep now," Father said gently as he drew a cross on the boy's forehead before drifting off to sleep himself.

The little boy remained seated, still troubled. He woke up the Father once again.

Father sat up with difficulty, "What's wrong, my little man?" he asked.

"I still hear someone crying, Father," the little boy said.

Father's concern deepened as he became aware that something was wrong. His drowsiness vanished. "Who is crying? Do you hear it even when you are awake?" he asked.

“Yes, Father. I hear a little girl's cry,” the boy responded.

"What? A little girl's cry?" Father exclaimed, his concern deepening. He got up to turn on the lamp and then sat beside the boy. Vijay placed his head on Father's lap. Father gently caressed him while singing a Christian Malayalam hymn aloud, trying to comfort the boy.

“Vandhanam Yeshuparaa.. Ninakennum
Vandhanam Yeshuparaa..
Vandhanam cheyunnu ninnadiyaar thiru

Naamathinaathaaramai..”

Vijay gradually dozed off while listening to the soothing song. The scene fades to black, signifying the end of the scene.

The screen illuminates with the words, "After a week..."

Both of them were sleeping again. Vijay was startled and sits up with fear. He wakes up the Father. This time, Vijay was also in tears..

“Father!! Father!!”

Father awoke and was taken aback when he saw Vijay in tears. "What happened, my dear boy? What's wrong?" he asked, his concern evident in his voice.

"Like that day, I hear the girl's cry once again, Father,” Vijay confessed.

Father looked at him with deep concern. He turned on the lamp once more and sat beside Vijay. Gently, he drew a cross on Vijay's forehead and embraced him tightly, holding him close to his chest. He tenderly caressed Vijay's hair, trying to comfort him, but Vijay continued to cry inconsolably.

"I still hear that wailing sound, Father,"

Father patted him gently. "Don't worry, my little man," he spoke soothingly. "Tell Lord Jesus... Everything will be alright.”

Vijay repeated with tears, "Lord Jesus... Please... Please save me..." Father's eyes became moist as he heard Vijay's heartfelt plea. Father closed his eyes and prayed to God in his heart, as soon as he did, the tear drops that welled up in his eyes landed on Vijay's shirt.

Chapter 28 - The First Meeting in the Vast Spiritual Plane

"Our souls dance together in the cosmic symphony, feeling every note of joy and every chord of pain, no matter the distance." - Whispered Symphony: A Kaleidoscope of Poetic Reveries

Shakthiyundu shakthiyundu atputhashakthi
Yeshuvin rakthathil..
Shakthiyundu shakthiyundu atputhashakthi
Yeshu Christhuvin rakthathil..

The church members sang the hymn and worshipped, while Vijay sat among them, trembling and shedding tears. Father Isaac Mariyan rested a wooden cross on Vijay's head, praying fervently with a rosary in his other hand, rolling its beads as he prayed aloud.

"I command the evil troubling this child to depart in the name of Jesus!"

Father repeated the command three times, yet Vijay showed no reaction, continuing to sob and grow more frightened. Father then embraced him and signalled for the congregation to stop singing.

"There is no unclean spirit within my child.. If there were, it would have manifested by now.. Haven't we seen a lot of cases? There is nothing wrong with my child," as Father reassured Vijay, the congregants began to disperse.

Father whispered gently in Vijay's ear, "Relax... Relax, Vijay... There's nothing wrong with you. I was mistaken.. There's no evil spirit within you.. You are a child of God, aren't you? Nothing can trouble you.." As Father's words sank in, Vijay's tears began to subside, though he continued to sob softly. Father tenderly stroked Vijay's hair, offering comfort and reassurance.

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1983, Koodal Nagar, Madurai…
Sahaya Annai Mental Health Clinic..

"This condition is known as ‘Auditory Hallucination.’ It is a mental disorder, not caused by any evil spirit or demon. The patient perceives sounds such as speaking, laughter, or crying. If left untreated, it could lead to conditions like Schizophrenia.”

A renowned psychiatrist in Madurai was describing Vijay's condition to Father Isaac Mariyan, who listened with a heavy heart. Meanwhile, Vijay sat in the reception area, quietly sketching a portrait of Rajinikanth on a slate with chalk. A person seated beside him observed Vijay with surprise.

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Upon returning to Ilandhaipatti, Vijay resumed his usual routine, studying, playing, drawing and praying without any apparent issues. However, after ten days, he encountered the same problem. While at school, listening to his favorite subject, Tamil. He suddenly heard the crying noise again and broke down in tears. His Tamil teacher, concerned for Vijay, offered him a ride on his bicycle and dropped him off at the chapel.

Father was immersed in his fasting and fervent prayers for Vijay, while at the same time, Vijay was brought back home by the teacher, for the same concern he was praying about. This deeply saddened Father, leading him to question, "Why does this happen to my child, Lord?" Father was wrestling with his faith and suddenly he found inspiration.. He looked at Vijay..

"Vijay, you mentioned hearing a girl's crying. Is it always the same voice, or do you hear different voices?”

Vijay replied, “ No, Father.. It is always the same girl's voice.”

Father, "Vijay, are you willing to listen to what I am about to say?”

Vijay responded, “ Of course, I will listen to whatever you say, Father..”

Father explained, “Initially, I believed this might be the result of an evil spirit. But through prayer, I confirmed it was not so. Then, I presumed it might be a mental illness, but the Holy Spirit assures me it is not a psychiatric disorder. This suggests it could be something else…”

"What could it be, Father?" Vijay's face was pale in fear.

"Don't worry, my boy," Father comforted. "It is possible that somewhere, a girl is struggling and in distress. The Lord has granted you the ability to hear her cry. Whenever you hear it, pray fervently and faithfully for her. Invoke Christ in your prayers to provide her with help.”

Vijay's eyes lit up with understanding.

“Are you hearing that girl's cry now?”

“Yes, Father. I'm still hearing it…”

“Go now, Vijay. Go.. Pray for her.." Father encouraged him.

Vijay ran eagerly to the altar, kneeling on the cushion where Father usually prayed. He gazed at the Crucifix of Christ and began to pray aloud with all his heart. His voice echoed through the street as he prayed fervently in his childish tone for about fifteen minutes. Suddenly, he stood up with a joyful cry of "Father! Father!" and ran towards Father, tears of joy streaming from his eyes.

Father inquired, “Vijay!! What happened?”

"I am... I am truly, truly happy, Father," Vijay exclaimed. "Jesus Christ must have heard my prayers. The girl must be okay now. She stopped crying... And... I feel like I am being showered with... Some.. Something... It feels amazing!" Vijay leaped with joy, his heart overflowing with gratitude.

Father asked him with a smile, "What do you feel you are being showered with, Vijay?”

"You mention it in church often... I don't know, Father.." Vijay replied, still leaping with joy as he ran out. Father Isaac Mariyan watched him happily, thanking the Holy Spirit of God, and continued to pray with a smile on his face.

Chapter 29 - I am Another You.. You are Another Me…

"You are a reflection of me, and I am a reflection of you. We are mirrors, endlessly reflecting each other's essence." - Unknown

Vijay dwelled in that delight for the next two days. After some days, he heard that same anomalous wail of a girl. Now he knew what he had to do. He prayed for her again; her cry subsided, and he was filled once again with ecstatic joy. This cycle continued frequently.

Vijay was satiated that he could render his assistance to some unknown girl. He began to pray for that anonymous girl every day, wondering about her identity, whereabouts, appearance, and the nature of her problem. With each passing day, his curiosity grew, driving him to learn everything about her.

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The film still continued to play in black and white. Vijay was now an eleven-year-old boy. Father Isaac Mariyan was called to deliver a sermon at a church in a nearby village. After finishing his work at the church, Father Isaac returned to Ilandhaipatti along with Vijay. They rode his bicycle along a narrow path that ran along the riverbank. The place looked green and flourishing, with a beautiful breeze making it even more pleasant.

People here and there were bathing, laundering, and washing their cows. Children were diving into the river and playing happily.

As Father peddled the bicycle, Vijay sat in the seat behind him, enjoying the popsicle Father had bought for him and kept talking to him."Father, you know what? That girl has started talking to me lately.. She asked me where I was from, and I showed her our chapel.." he explained joyfully.

"Is it? She might come to our chapel searching for you," Father said, chuckling. "How did she talk to you? Do you hear her speak just like the way you hear her cry?" Father inquired.

Vijay replied, "No, Father.. She speaks to me in my dreams.."

“Oh!! Do you have conversations in your dreams?" Father asked.

"Father... She lives somewhere else. I do not even know where she is. I am living here. If I can help her from here, I can keep her happy by staying by her side always, right, Father?" He asked in a childish manner..

Father teased him, "What are you saying now? Are you going to marry her? You, little brat!”

Vijay wiggled shyly, "Father!" he coyly exclaimed.

Father enjoyed his shyness and giggled.

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Vijay was now twenty years old, having grown into a young man. He had a tiny moustache now. Moreover, he had fallen head over heels for the anonymous princess who occupied the entirety of his heart. He never knew how she looked, whether she was fair or dark, tall or short. The only thing he knew about her was her despondent cry and the inexplicable feeling of ecstasy she experienced after he prayed for her, which was ineffable to describe..

“Does she know me like the way I know her beforehand? How would it be if we both knew each other previously and met each other in person someday? Could we both identify each other? Even if our eyes cannot recognise each other, our souls certainly can.

“I do not care if I have to cross seven seas and seven mountains. I will find her wherever she is. I will search for her in every corner of the earth and make her mine, by hook or by crook! If being near her soul brings me such inexplicable ecstasy, imagine living my life with her! I do not want the beauties of the world, I do not want millions of money, I do not want a luxurious life. I want only one thing. Her! Only her! I can sacrifice anything for her. But I will never leave her for anything else!

“Who is that girl? Where does she reside? How can I find her?”

She blended into Vijay's life, becoming his breath, his words, his feelings, his thoughts, his bones, and his blood.

Father learned that Vijay had become lovesick. When Father inquired about it, Vijay confessed that he had fallen for the mysterious girl. Father realised that Vijay was very curious to find her identity and whereabouts.

“Do not search for her outside. You will never find her if you search for her out there. How can you find her in this vast world where millions of women live? Search for her within you, because she is your other half. If she is your other half, all of her details will be inside you, right? Therefore, seek for her within you. Aren't you an artist, my boy? Bring her out from within you through your talent.”

Vijay's eyes lit up as he replied eagerly, "I am going to draw her, Father. I love her dearly, from the core of my heart, even before knowing how she looks. I do not care if she looks beautiful or not. She is my wife, however she looks. Now I know that she is my other half. I will go to any extreme to make her mine, Father."

From the following day, Vijay fasted for seven days, without even drinking a drop of water. He read the Bible and prayed fervently, doing nothing else. His

mind was focused. On the seventh day, he blindfolded himself with a black cloth and sketched her from within his heart. His eyes and his brain had no work there. He began to draw as per the commands of his subconscious mind.

Three hours might have passed…

When Vijay was satisfied that he had completed sketching her, he removed his blindfold and opened his eyes…

… … …

The other half of him, whom he had been searching for numerous epochs, stood before him as a portrait on the canvas board, smiling at him…

The film, which had been screened in black and white until then, turned into a colour film.. His life, too, became vibrant from that day forward..

Forgetting himself, he yelled aloud.. laughed.. cried.. leaped.. rolled.. and danced joyously…

Father came running as he heard the noise. He looked at the portrait Vijay drew and embraced him tightly. "My little boy!! Have you found her? Wow!! Your other half resembles just like you!!"

Vijay felt as though he had accomplished something that no one had ever achieved in this whole world. Father waited until he had finished celebrating his accomplishment, wanting to tell him something important.

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After two days…

In the chapel, below the altar, a mat was laid out with a Bible on top. When Father called out, Vijay came and sat before him..

"Vijay, you have found the consort of your soul? What are you going to do next?"

“I am going to search for her, Father.”

“Where will you go to search for her?”

“I will turn the whole world upside down to seek her.”

Father chuckled aloud..

"You little fool! Can you find her by searching the whole world? Is it that difficult for God to show you her place, who showed you her face?"

Vijay remained quiet.

Father said, “Do not hurry. Be still and decide meticulously. God may take you to her place if needed, or He might bring her to our place. Now, your only job is to study. Focus on your studies now. Everything that has to happen will happen at the right time.”

Vijay nodded. "Okay, Father.”

“Vijay, may I ask you another question?”

“ Sure, Father…”

“God had employed you as an excellent instrument to render help for her for some issue. However, had He ever promised you that He would make her your spouse?”

Vijay thought for a couple of moments before answering, "No, Father. But, what does it mean to be my other half? It means she is going to become my spouse, isn't it?"

Father giggled as he opened his Bible and read out the verse in Genesis 1:27. "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."

Vijay looked at Father's face quietly..

"According to this verse, what you said is correct. This verse says that God created each human in pairs, as male and female. You have found your other half, and you believe that she will be your spouse. Which means, my other half should have become my spouse, right? But, she could have become someone else's wife and she must be living somewhere…"

Vijay replied, "That was your own decision, Father. You wanted to serve God as a celibate person, didn't you?"

"Mmmm... That's what I am saying. It was my own decision.. God has given each and every man and woman the right to choose whatever they want to be.. The Bible says that God Himself gave humans this right. God will never intervene in that right. He also does not like people intervening in that right to control one another. Therefore, things do not happen the way you think, Vijay. I mean, in reality, the feres of souls do not necessarily find each other to marry them.."

Vijay's face drooped.. He apprehended what Father was about to say..

"You can only hear sound if you clap with both hands, Vijay.. That girl should love you the way you love her. Otherwise, you should dignifiedly move away from her. You should never force yourself on her life if she rejects you."

Vijay did not utter a word..

“Through a wonderful, miraculous experience, you have found your other half. How can you be certain that she could have found you? She might not even know who you are..”

Vijay's face drained of colour because of sorrow and fear. "I understand, Father," he murmured.

“I was the one who gave you the idea to find her. From the day you sketched her, I have been praying to God day and night that you should unite with her. There is nothing wrong with beseeching God to provide what we desire. However, you should know about the pros and cons of everything, Vijay. That's why I am saying, she has the right to either accept or reject your love. And you have to respect her right to choose.”

Though Vijay's lips accepted what Father said, a question kept gnawing at his heart. “How could the consort of my soul possibly dislike me? How could she reject my love? It will never happen... Father dissuades me because of his concern for me, or perhaps out of needless fear.”

He did not display the thoughts of his heart on his face. He feigned obedience and nodded, "Okay, Father."

Chapter 30 - That Indelible Day..

"A meeting between two beings who complete each other, who are made for each other, borders already, in my opinion, on a miracle." — Arthur Rimbaud

In a fortnight, the archbishop of that diocese had to cross the area where Vijay and Father lived. Father called the archbishop to their home and arranged a feast for him. Vijay served him lunch very happily.

The archbishop already knew that Father Isaac Mariyan had an adopted son. However, it was the first time he saw Vijay in person. Impressed by Vijay's hospitality and humility, the archbishop inquired about what Vijay was doing.

It had been a year since Vijay completed his B.A. at Madurai American College. When the archbishop learned that Vijay was studying a computer course, he said, 'There is a vacant slot for an M.A. at Annai Fatima Theological Seminary in Alagaradi. It is my quota, and you can study there without paying any fees. Will you join and study there, Vijay?' As soon as he asked, Vijay joyfully accepted and nodded yes.

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It had been a couple of weeks since Vijay joined the M.A. program in Religion and Philosophy at Annai Fatima Theological Seminary. Vijay liked the college premises, which resembled a flourishing orchard. He also made good friends there.

1997, August 27…

The audio cassette of the film Pardes, starring Shahrukh Khan, Vijay's favourite actor, was released in Madurai a few days ago. That afternoon, after

his classes were over, he met his friend who owned a cassette shop on Town Hall Road, Madurai. He bought the audio cassette of the Pardes movie and returned to the hostel to listen to the songs with his friends.

It was around 3:30 pm…

Vijay was wearing a full-sleeve black t-shirt paired with black jeans. He usually walks very fast and could easily outpace anyone walking with him.

A few yards ahead of him, a girl in a baby pink salwar with dark brown hair pulled up into a ponytail was walking slowly. Vijay walked past her.

Vijay felt as if someone had showered his soul with the freezing snow of the Himachal. It was as if thousands of butterflies had taken flight within him. Not knowing why he felt this mysterious sensation as he crossed the girl, he turned back to see her face.

The movie, which had been progressing at a normal pace until then, suddenly played in slow motion. Pleasant background music began to play. Vijay could not believe his own eyes. Is this real? Is it her? Or is it someone who just resembles her?

The happiness that Vijay used to feel after praying for her now multiplied a thousandfold upon seeing her in person.

No, no, this is her... My soul assures me.. It is certainly her…

As the background score gradually escalated to its peak, Vijay found himself in a daze... He walked ten feet ahead, only to turn once again to catch another glimpse of her…

His soul danced joyously within him.. 'Does my Angel live here? Dear God, did you bring me here for this?' he whispered in awe..

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As Sanjana watched the movie, she began to tremble. Covering her face with her palms, she cried out, 'Alas!!' before falling from the sofa where she had been sitting.. Her cries seemed to echo as if her heart was exploding... Diya, shocked by the scene, could only watch in disbelief…

“Vijay!! Vijay!! Vijay!!!”

Diya had seen her mother cry many times, but she had never witnessed Sanjana cry like a baby, rolling on the floor. Melne and Qureshi looked at each other cluelessly, unsure of what to do.

The movie was paused..

Sanjana kept calling out, 'Vijay!! Vijay!!' and cried inconsolably.. Everyone was afraid that her heart would cease if she continued to cry like this. Qureshi moved the chairs aside, making way for Diya and Melne, who lifted Sanjana and seated her on the sofa. Diya hugged her mother tightly, offering comfort. Despite their efforts, Sanjana's tears could not be stemmed.. The pains that had been buried deep inside her for decades poured out in torrents of tears..

Half an hour passed before Sanjana managed to calm herself..

Diya escorted Sanjana to the restroom, where she washed her face before returning her to the preview theatre, supporting her along the way. Qureshi brought a cup of water, which Sanjana drank before turning to face Melne..

“I need to talk to Vijay right now.. Can you call him from your phone?”

Melne stood like a statue before her, unable to even open his lips to speak…

“Please, Melne… Call him right now..”

As Melne stood there without saying a word, Sanjana began to quiver, sensing that something was wrong…

“What happened, Melne??”

“Melne…Tell me.. What happened to him?”

Melne spoke in a quivering tone..

“It's been five years since Vijay passed away…”

Chapter 31 - This Life of Mine is Solely For You…

"Unrequited love is the infinite curse of a lonely heart." - Christina Westover

Sanjana sat still as an inert corse, her heart beseeching God that the words she had heard moments ago were falsehoods. She felt as though her heart had ruptured, blood seeping out in the form of tears.

Diya feared that this distressing news might worsen her mother's condition, already burdened with physical challenges.

Melne composed himself before speaking.

“When I was in my second year of M.Sc. in communications, Vijay joined as a fresher in M.A. Despite advice from Vanitha and me to refrain from bothering you further, he continued to follow you.. Consequently, I ended my friendship with him, never contacting him again. Even in person, I would simply walk past him…

“Even after college, I occasionally received updates about him through my juniors. I learned that he persisted in following you and even went as far as learning Bengali for you. I began to think of him as irrational..

“Years later, in 2015, at the Communications Department Alumni meet, I ran into my junior Viji. During our conversation, the topic of Vijay arose. It was then that she revealed to me the reason behind Vijay's sincere affection for you. She also mentioned that he still lived as a bachelor, cherishing memories of you. By that time, I was deeply engrossed in the post-production work of my first movie. I regretted misjudging such a dignified man. I wanted to apologise to him in person, but my hectic schedule left me with no time for a visit..

“After directing two successful crime thrillers in Malayalam cinema, I desired to explore a different genre for my third movie—a romance. It was during this time that thoughts of Vijay resurfaced. In January 2017, amid the height of the Jallikattu protests in Tamil Nadu, a period marked by statewide standstills, I traveled to Vijay's hometown and visited him. I ended up staying with him for two months.

“Until his last breath, every part of Vijay's existence was intertwined with you, Sanjana. I have never witnessed such profound and sincere love for another person. He confided in me that until 2003, he found it difficult to believe that you and Kailash were truly married. Until then, he relentlessly tried to reach out to you and discover your whereabouts. Eventually, he recounted speaking with you and meeting you in 2003, along with the subsequent events. He expressed how he felt like an empty husk upon learning of your marriage. When I saw him, he was no longer the handsome, stylish Vijay of the '90s; he appeared shattered and devoid of life.

“After 2008, Vijay transformed into a social activist, advocating for various causes despite facing opposition. In 2019, he protested on behalf of the people and was imprisoned for three months. I am unaware of the specifics of his time in prison, but his health deteriorated upon release. He likely realised his time was limited. Perhaps he found solace in the belief that death would heal the wounds of his heart. Despite his own struggles, his service helped his village and neighbouring areas thrive. You should visit his village sometime; there's a surprise waiting for you there.

"I stayed with Vijay for a month before he passed away. On the night of Diwali in 2019, his health deteriorated so severely that he was admitted to Madurai Government Hospital. The entire village gathered outside the hospital, forsaking Diwali celebrations. I remained by his side until his last breath. Even in his final moments, he kept murmuring your name, calling out 'Sanjana! Sanjana!' despite struggling for his life. The doctors then asked me,

'Who is Sanjana? Ask her to visit him; Vijay might revive if he sees her.' However, we were already exhausted from searching for you. How could we have found you at that time? He continued to struggle until the next morning, when his life came to an end."

Sanjana's heart shattered upon hearing Melne's words, feeling as helpless as a worm falling into fire. In Indian time, it was the morning after Diwali; in European time, it was the night of Diwali when Sanjana had her final dream, the same time that Vijay died. In the dream, amidst utter darkness, Vijay knelt down, stretching his hands towards Sanjana, pleading for help and weeping inconsolably. With no one to inquire about his sorrow or offer solace, he eventually vanished into the darkness, dissolving into thin air.

Chapter 32 - Once Again in Madurai…

"Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all." - Proverbs 31:10-12,28,29 (The Holy Bible)

An Innova car traveled from Madurai Airport to Ilandhaipatti with Sanjana, Kailash, Diya, Melne, and Vanitha as passengers.

Sanjana was extremely fatigued. She was so exhausted that she leaned on Kailash's shoulder and fell asleep.

Kailash was completely broken, with countless thoughts racing through his mind. “How did I not know there was such a sorrowful story in my dear wife's life? Even after knowing her true counterpart of the soul, she didn't give him space in her heart or life. Instead, she chose to be with me, married me, and remained faithful to me until the end. Is she a real human or a deity in human form? How many men in this world are blessed with such a wonderful wife? Is it the goodness from my past life?

“Have you been carrying this excruciating pain in your heart for two and a half decades? Why did you conceal it from me? You have always shared everything with me. So why not this? Did you not want to burden me with your pain? Or did you think I would doubt your faithfulness? I would rather kill myself than ever doubt you, my dear…”

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Sanjana, who had been sleeping soundly on her husband's shoulder, suddenly awoke as if someone had shaken her. As she opened her eyes, she

glimpsed the signboard for "Annai Fatima Theological Seminary" as the car moved past the hostel.

"Stop the car," Sanjana shouted. The driver pulled over near the seminary.

"How did I doze off? And how did I wake up just as we reached this place? Vijay, are you staying by my side?" she thought to herself as she got down from the car.

As she stepped onto the ground and inhaled the air of Madurai, her thoughts began to travel backward in time unbeknownst to herself.

The driver parked the car at the same place where Vijay had first seen Sanjana and turned to observe her once more. In 25 years, Madurai had changed drastically. Shopping centres now dominated most of the cityscape. Kumaran Coffee Bar, where Sanjana and Bobby used to buy coffee in their flasks, was now replaced by KFC.

"Wow!! Is this really Madurai?" Sanjana exclaimed. Everywhere she looked, thoughts of Vijay flashed before her eyes. She recalled the way he would walk, gazing at her with longing. She felt as if she could sit there and relish the nostalgic memories of her past.

"Bobby, where in the world are you now? What are you doing? I really want to talk to you... about so many things. Do you know what has happened in my life? Will you come here for a while? Will you sit with me and talk to me?" Sanjana's heart cried out.

She walked a few yards and entered the campus of the theological seminary. She felt a sense of relief to see that the college hadn't changed. As she caught sight of the Annai Teresa Hostel, she stood there motionless, tears flooding from her eyes. Crossing the security post, she entered inside.

The pleasant fragrance of the trees transported her back to the '90s, her heart heavy with emotion. Looking behind, she saw Diya and Kailash approaching. She waited for them to reach her, then walked along with them, passing the place where the telephone booth once stood, now replaced by a small coffee shop.

She informed Kailash, "The telephone booth where I used to phone you was here." Then, she showed Diya the chamber where Bobby and she had stayed. After touring the campus once, she climbed into the car with a heavy heart.

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The car reached near Ilandhaipatti, it was a village called Madhampatti.

Sanjana was portrayed as a model for schools, libraries, institutes, water tanks, and water pumps. Her eyes widened with surprise as soon as she saw herself painted everywhere. The villagers who identified Sanjana surrounded her. They gazed at her as if they were looking at some wonder of the world..

"Melne, what is this?"

Melne responded to Sanjana, who asked astonished, "I told you that there was a surprise waiting for you in Vijay's village, didn't I? This is the surprise…"

The car arrived at Ilandhaipatti. As Melne had already informed the villagers about Sanjana's arrival, they awaited her with garlands to welcome her. Melne took Sanjana and the others initially to a Panchayat Union Primary School, where Vijay had completed his primary education.

Sanjana stood as an artwork all over the walls of the school. She held a board in her hand in each of the portraits. There were 26 pictures for all the English alphabets, from A for Apple, B for Bat, until Z.

There was a water pump outside the school. Sanjana stood as a model for that too, with a board saying, "Don't waste water!"

Sanjana's picture was all over the village.

Sanjana and the others eyed it in an astonished manner.

Melne spoke, "Vijay did all this with the funds he received. Many people from abroad sent him money after seeing his service to the village. He never used any of it for himself. He resided at the church until his last moment and spent every penny for the betterment of the village. The only thing he did for himself was to portray you as a model for everything.

"He wanted to see you everywhere, Sanjana. He wished to see you at least through these paintings because he couldn't see you in person or live with you. In the surrounding ten villages, your portraits are everywhere, Sanjana."

The women of the village surrounded Sanjana… "He couldn't stop thinking about you until his very last breath... But you never came around when he was desperately hoping to see you... He's resting under the banyan tree...Why don't you go and see him?"

Although Sanjana couldn't grasp every word spoken in Tamil, She got the gist of what they were saying… She felt as though her heart was ripped with an axe..

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Melne took Sanjana and the others to the tomb where Vijay was buried. The whole village gathered and followed behind them.

In the tomb, Vijay's picture in his twenties was engraved. Sanjana, who had kept her composure until then, burst into tears as soon as she approached the tomb and caught sight of his picture. She fell onto the tomb and cried out loud.

“Vijay... I'm Sanjana... Look at me, Vijay... I've come to see you… "Damn! I've always avoided you... I'm here to see you now, Vijay... Please, just look at me…”

Diya rushed over to lift her up, but Kailash stopped her. "Let her cry her heart out," he said.

Sanjana let out all her emotions, babbling while crying. Her voice was hoarse, her throat dry, and she couldn't speak anymore.

She kept weeping and moaned, "Look at me, Vijay... Please... Please, look at me…”

Vanitha, Melne's wife, and Sanjana's senior, ran to lift Sanjana up from there. She shook her and uttered, "Sanjana, Vijay is looking at you even at this moment... Even now..”

Sanjana thought she was saying this to comfort her and sat there, still moaning..

"Sanjana, I'm not lying to you... You won't understand until you see it for yourself... Come, get up, see for yourself," Vanitha urged.. Sanjana tried to get up from there, her mind filled with questions. Vanitha lifted her up, while Kailash and Diya escorted her to the car..

Chapter 33 - Solitude in the Extensive Spiritual Plane

"Even if we lose each other here, I know there's a meeting place. There's a place where our souls will find each other again." - Rumi

Sanjana, Kailash, and Diya were sitting inside the chapel where Vijay lived. Another priest was appointed to serve that chapel. Melne brought his laptop from the car.

“Watch this video, Sanjana. It was taken four days before Vijay's passing. He wanted to talk to you. I captured this video. I wanted to show it to you a long time ago. We searched for you everywhere. On social media, we also inquired with each of your friends to see if you had kept in touch with anyone. We could not find you anywhere. At last, it seems we were destined to find you through Mr. Qureshi's efforts..”

Melne played the video..

Vijay appeared on the screen. Sanjana looked closely to see if it was really him; his appearance had changed that much. He looked broken, slender, and weak. He was wearing a very simple, half-sleeve white checked shirt. His hair, moustache, and beard were almost entirely grey. His eyes had lost their vibrance. His face was lined with wrinkles, making him appear like an old man in his late sixties.

“How are you, Sanjana? I will not be alive when you watch this video. I am certain that you would have watched the film directed by Melne. When we met in Chennai, you asked me why I fell for you. I believe you must have learned the answer after watching Melne's movie..

“I have the same question as you: 'Did you know me beforehand just as I knew you before we met in person?' This question still haunts me, but I am going to perish without knowing the answer..

“It took me many years to realise that you were actually married, Sanjana. I kept waiting for you, thinking that you had lied about being married just to avoid me. I believed so strongly that you belonged to me. That's why I sent those SMS to you. After learning that you were indeed married, I regretted sending such messages. Please forgive me, Sanjana..

"I am reminding you again about the information I shared with you earlier when we met in Chennai. You are a spiritualist, Sanjana. The second half of your life will be great. You are going to be a spiritual guide for millions of people across numerous generations. Do you ask me how I know this? I just know!

“You are going to serve as a spiritualist with your family, not as an ascetic. There will be no worries in your life hereafter. All your days of sorrow are over…

“Well, about me... Despite painting your picture everywhere around me, despite living with you in my imagination... The truth that you are not with me really haunts me, Sanjana. Each passing day becomes more and more bitter without you…

"I am longing to see you in person. At least, I want to hear your voice on the phone. Why did you give me such a ruthless punishment, Sanjana? You could have at least accepted me as a friend and talked to me…

“My entire life has ended in waiting. My heart has become so weary. Death seems to be the only remedy I know. When I learned that you were not mine, I was utterly defeated. The separation from you is like a true death to me. Not the separation from this body of mine, which is a torment of living without

you. This death, which will grant me freedom from the agony of living without you, is a blessing to me, Sanjana.

“I am going, Sanjana. I will continue to wait for you. But please, don't rush to come after me. As I have already told you, you have a noble mission in this world. Fulfill it completely, and then come. Take care of your husband and family.

“I will continue to love you forever, Sanjana. Our love has no beginning or end. We will meet again in some spiritual realm beyond this earth.. I will wait for you there until then.”

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As the video in which Vijay spoke ended, the scene transitioned. He had already purchased a coffin box for himself. Inside, he was painting Sanjana on the closing lid, depicting her as he first saw her: wearing a baby pink salwar, her long dark brown tresses pulled into a ponytail, a tiny red bindi on her forehead, and an alluring smile on her lips.

In the next scene, he had completed the painting, and the lid was placed on the wall. Vijay stood beside it, the painting perfectly matching his height. He was dressed in a white shirt and a violet lungi.

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In the next scene, Vijay was laid inside the coffin as a corpse. Wailing, weeping, and moaning sounds filled the air. Numerous garlands were placed upon him, and some priests and pastors stood nearby, singing hymns.

As a priest attempted to close Vijay's eyes, Melne and other friends intervened, stopping him and insisting that Vijay's eyes remain open. His body was then prepared for burial. The garlands were removed from his

body. As a priest led the final prayer, the coffin lid bearing Sanjana's image was brought to the scene.

They placed the lid, allowing Vijay's open eyes and the eyes of Sanjana's portrait to meet each other, before nailing the lid shut.

Sanjana watched the video, feeling like a lifeless corpse herself. Yet, the final words of Vijay continued to echo in her ears…

“We will meet again in some spiritual realm beyond the earth.. I will wait for you there until then..”

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